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SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2002

Volume 1, Issue 71

Santa Monica Daily Press

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Teenager arrested for Maran murder committed suicide

Anti-depressant found in supect's body

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON
Daily Press Staff Writer

The teenager arrested for murdering a 15-year-old Santa Monica High School sophomore died of an overdose while she was being interrogated by police, the Los Angeles County Coroner's said Friday.

According to the toxicology report, 17-year-old Katrina Sarkissian committed suicide by ingesting nortriptyline intoxication. The drug also is known as "Pamelor."

Sarkissian was picked up by police on a murder warrant Nov. 18, the day after Deanna Maran was stabbed at a party in Westwood. But Sarkissian collapsed during police questioning and died a few hours later. Sources had told the Daily Press that Sarkissian could have taken sleeping pills to possibly avoid the murder charges brought against her.



Deanna Maran

Sarkissian's 15-year-old half-sister and a Santa Monica High School senior may be charged in connection with Maran's murder. The Los Angeles District Attorney's office is still determining if there is enough evidence to bring charges against the two teenagers. A determination is expected next week.

The family of the 15-year-old has hired a defense attorney, sources said.

The tragedy began after Maran found the 15-year-old breaking potted plants behind the house where the party was held. Maran told her to stop, which started a fight. Partygoers broke up the confrontation but another one ensued after Sarkissian and her friends arrived at the party.

According to witnesses, Maran allegedly was jumped by Sarkissian, her half-sister and the Santa Monica high school senior. They allegedly pinned Maran down to the ground, beat her and stabbed her with a knife. Sarkissian is

See SUICIDE, page 3



Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press

City employee Rick Raygosa covers up graffiti in an alley between Wilshire Boulevard and California Avenue off of Third Street.

Santa Monica's north side 'tagged' by gang graffiti

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON
Daily Press Staff Writer

A recent surge of graffiti on Santa Monica's north and west sides has residents worried and the city's clean-up crews working overtime.

"I'm going to write to my director because it has increased dramatically in the last month," said Kim Braun of the city's facilities management office.

The city employs two full-time "graffiti technicians" who remove between 60 and 80 tags a day — and it's been more like 80 the past few weeks.

"Wilshire got hit pretty hard this week," said Craig Stoll, crew leader for the city's graffiti technicians.

Graffiti is expected on the south side of town and the Pico neighborhood on the east side where the main area of gang activity is standard, Braun said. But Wilshire Boulevard and the residential neighborhoods north to Montana Avenue are not usual targets for gang tags, she said.

"I've lived here almost three years an I've never seen this much graffiti," said Santa Monica resident Jason Auslander, who lives near 14th Street and Arizona Avenue.

See TAGS, page 3

Actress Winona Ryder charged with four felonies

BY LINDA DEUTSCH
AP Special Correspondent

LOS ANGELES — Actress Winona Ryder, arrested just before Christmas for allegedly shoplifting at Saks Fifth Avenue in Beverly Hills, was charged Friday with felony counts of theft, burglary, vandalism and possession of a controlled substance.

The "Girl, Interrupted" star, free on $20,000 bond, is scheduled to be arraigned in Beverly Hills on Feb. 8. She faces up to three years, eight months in prison, but district attorney's spokeswoman Sandi Gibbons said a judge could impose a lesser sentence, including the possibility of probation.

Prosecutors are asking that bail be raised to $30,000.

Ryder, 30, was arrested Dec. 12 for allegedly stealing merchandise worth $4,760 and possessing painkillers without a prescription.

Beverly Hills police said store security officers saw her remove security tags from the store items, place them in her bag and leave the store.

Prosecutors identified the controlled substance Friday as Oxycodone, a morphine derivative.

Ryder's attorney, Mark Geragos, contended after the arrest that the actress was merely carrying items between store departments, not trying to steal them. He said she had receipts for other items she bought in the store, and a valid prescription for the painkillers.

"I believe that this is overcharged for the conduct they alleged. I don't know why the necessity was felt to make this a media circus," Geragos said Friday. He said he hoped the case could be resolved without a trial.

"I'm hopeful that once I'm able to lay out all of the evidence reasonable minds will prevail and realize that this is not a felony case."

"We are shocked at what appear to be grossly exaggerated charges," Ryder's publicist Mara Buxbaum said in a statement. "We look forward to the opportunity to explain and resolve these allegations."

Ryder earned Oscar nominations for playing the heroines in period films, "Little Women" and "The Age of Innocence." She also won acclaim for depicting a troubled young woman in "Girl, Interrupted" and starred in "Heathers," "Beetlejuice" and "Reality Bites."

A star since her teens, Ryder grew up in hippie surroundings, living at times in San Francisco and on a California commune. Her family's friends included beat poet Allen Ginsberg, and her godfather was psychedelic drug advocate Timothy Leary.

Ryder, who has dated actors Matt Damon and Johnny Depp, has maintained a grueling film schedule she has blamed for causing occasional mental breakdowns.

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ARIES (March 21-April 19)
★★★★★ Though you're more than capable of energizing yourself, a partner or friend starts your day with a bang. You could be all smiles, as this person asks you to join him or her. Surprises surround your friends. Hop on the bandwagon. Get into the mood. Tonight: Follow your friends.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
★★★ Your even disposition allows a partner to reveal much more. You want to touch base with a parent or older friend. Share more of what lies between you. Unexpected behavior might shake you up for a brief moment. You've got to admit that it spices up your life. Tonight: Relax. Put your feet up.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20)
★★★★★ You can do no wrong right now. Opt for spontaneity. Take off whenever you want. Take a risk if you want, because you will land well. An unexpected call manages to delight and surprise you. Pay attention to a child or loved one.

CANCER (June 21-July 22)
★★★★ Stay anchored and know what you need to do in order to achieve the results you want. Someone attempts to court your affections. Don't feel cornered. See what this person is about. You can decide that this isn't for you. Others prove reactive. Tonight: Happy close to home.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)
★★★★★ Others respond to your wishes. In fact, someone finally goes out of his or her way to adapt to your plans. What this person expresses, even at this late date, could be surprising. This person definitely does the unexpected. Detach and realize that this trait attracts you. Tonight: Out and about.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)
★★★★ Indulge someone financially. This person might even be you! A new purchase for your home or workplace could make it easier for you to work. Luxuriate and do something special. Open up to new technology. Ask needed questions to get the answers. Tonight: Dinner out.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)
★★★★★ Use your magnetism to zero in on what you want. Your happy personality melts someone's barriers. Think about what you need. Carefully reach out for someone you care about. Improvise. Go with a last-minute suggestion. Tonight: Whatever puts a smile on your face.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)
★★★ Step back and allow someone to do for you. You could be ear-to-ear smiles, resembling the Cheshire cat. Play it low-key and just let it be. Share feelings. Adapt to an unexpected happening. These events easily could make your day more exciting. Tonight: Happy at home.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)
★★★★★ Get out the door and surround yourself with people. Invite a new friend and/or loved one out for brunch. While nibbling together, many doors open. Discuss thoughts. Share a secret. Accept a surprise and go along with someone's ideas. Tonight: You are the party.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)
★★★★ Delight an older parent or relative with a card, a bunch of flowers or tickets to a favorite event. Give more of yourself to others. Don't always be businesslike. Let down your guard, and you discover just how much you care about those in your life. Tonight: Indulge someone, and you indulge yourself.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)
★★★★★ Reach out with caring. Make long-distance calls; make an effort to speak to someone. Your friendliness draws many people. Recognize that someone might harbor strong feelings for you. Though taken by surprise, you just might like what is happening. Tonight: Be spontaneous.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)
★★★★★ A partner or loved one knows just what to say in order to open you up. Share your stronger feelings with this trusted person. You could be surprised at how well he or she knows you, perhaps better than you know yourself. You can count on this person. Tonight: Dinner for two.

WEATHER

Today ...	Mostly Sunny	High—63°F	Low—41°F
Tomorrow ...	Mostly Sunny	High—65°F	Low—42°F
Monday ...	Partly Cloudy	High—67°F	Low—44°F

QUOTE of the DAY

"Nothing is said that has not been said before."
— Terence *(185-159 B.C.)*

Santa Monica Daily Press

Published Monday through Saturday
Phone: 310.458.PRESS(7737) • Fax: 310.576.9913
530 Wilshire Blvd., Suite #200 • Santa Monica, CA 90401

PUBLISHER
Ross Furukawa . . . . . .ross@smdp.com
EDITOR
Carolyn Sackariason . . .sack@smdp.com
PRODUCTION MANAGER
Del Pastrana . . . . . .del@smdp.com
CLASSIFIED REPRESENTATIVE
Angela Downen . . . . . .angela@smdp.com
SALES REPRESENTATIVE
Steve Kenedy . . . . . .steve@smdp.com
CIRCULATION MANAGER
Kiutzu Cruz . . . . . .kiutzu@smdp.com
PUBLIC RELATIONS
Jennifer (JT) Tate . . . . . .jt@smdp.com
TEST SUBJECT
Dave Danforth . . . . . .dave@smdp.com

LOCAL ▫ STATE

Suicide drug widely used to treat depression

SUICIDE, from page 1

believed to have been the one who stabbed Maran.

Throughout the fight, dozens of people watched as Maran was kicked and punched, but nobody came to her aid—even when she stood up, clutched her chest, gasped for air and collapsed.

Instead of calling an ambulance, Maran's friends drove her to Santa Monica Hospital where she was pronounced dead at 12:15 a.m. on Nov. 18.

Sarkissian and the 15-year-old were arrested about 14 hours later. Sarkissian was rushed to UCLA Medical Center after she collapsed during the police interview and died at 5:26 p.m., police said.

It's unclear where Sarkissian obtained the drug, which is a narcotic widely used to treat depression. It also is prescribed for chronic skin disorders, migraine headaches, panic disorder, arthritis and bedwetting, among other ailments.

A normal dosage is about 75 milligrams a day, which could be between one and three pills daily, said Dr. Mintz, a Santa Monica physician. He added that the drug's highest concentration level is reached seven to eight hours after taking it.

"It doesn't stand out as a suicide drug but she may have had a pile of these things and threw them down her throat."

— DR. MINTZ
Santa Monica physician

"It works on the seratonin part of the brain and has a therapeutic quality to it," he said. "It's possible to reasonably speculate that she had took the drugs hours before she died.

"Like any drug, if you take too much of it, you can die," he added. "It doesn't stand out as a suicide drug but she may have had a pile of these things and threw them down her throat."

The side effects of the drug include seizures, which Sarkissian had while in police custody.

Chief Parks honored



Lee Celano/Associated Press

Los Angeles Police Department deputy chiefs applaud in a show of support for Chief Bernard Parks on Thursday in Los Angeles at a banquet celebrating Parks' 37th anniversary with the LAPD. Parks signed papers formally requesting reappointment as chief by the Los Angeles Police Commission.

Police want Mike Tyson charged in two rape cases

By The Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Las Vegas police have recommended sexual assault charges be filed against heavyweight boxer Mike Tyson in two cases, a prosecutor said Friday.

Prosecutors and police met for two hours Friday to discuss a September complaint by a Las Vegas woman and a November 2000 allegation from another woman identified by police as being in her 20s and an out-of-state resident. The second case was not reported to police until December.

"They've done a very thorough investigation," Chief Deputy District Attorney Doug Herndon told The Associated Press.

He said police are seeking arrest warrants from prosecutors for Tyson on multiple counts of sexual assault for each victim.

Herndon said he requested police submit information about Tyson's 1991 rape conviction in Indiana and a sexual battery allegation made by a woman last year in Big Bear, Calif. Tyson was cleared of the allegation in California.

Herndon said it would be several weeks to a month before prosecutors decide whether to charge Tyson.

Messages left with a Tyson spokesman and lawyer were not immediately returned, though representatives for the former heavyweight champion have said he has cooperated with authorities.

"I'm hopeful the Clark County district attorney's office will conduct a diligent and thorough review of the charges and dismiss this," Tyson attorney Darrow Soll said from Phoenix earlier this week.

On Tuesday, the Nevada Athletic Commission voted 4-1 to refuse Tyson a license to challenge heavyweight champion Lennox Lewis on April 6 at the MGM Grand hotel-casino.

Police began investigating Tyson in mid-September, after a Las Vegas woman went to a hospital with injuries that she said were suffered when the boxer raped her at his home.

Herndon said the woman had been in a six-month romantic relationship with Tyson.

Police searched Tyson's $1.3 million home for more than six hours on Sept. 26 and confiscated several boxes of material, including videotapes, sheets and towels.

The second woman went to police Dec. 28 and reported that she also had been attacked at Tyson's home in November 2000. The woman initially went to police near her home and reported that she had been raped, Las Vegas investigators said.

The police department the woman first contacted never reported the case to Las Vegas police, who have not identified the first agency.

Graffiti 'tags' found on almost anything

TAGS, from page 1

"Santa Monica 17th Street" showed up behind apartment buildings on Idaho Avenue and 11th Street. One property owner in the neighborhood, who wished to remain anonymous, is concerned that turf wars will begin in a section of town that is considered "upscale" rental properties.

"I'm sick of seeing this stuff all over," she said. "This is supposed to be the nice part of town."

Police haven't seen an increase in gang activity in the area and have not received any reports of more graffiti either, said Lt. Frank Fabrega, Santa Monica Police Department spokesman.

Stoll said gang tags are found on just about anything — from alleys, benches and curbs to buildings, trees, parking meters and mailboxes.

"They like high profile places," he said.

Most of the time the tags are names of members or their gang titles.

"We can recognize some of it but some of it we can't figure it out," Stoll said. "They do it out of boredom. You'll get guys from Venice and Culver City who just drive around ... they create rivalry.

Said graffiti technician Hector Gonzales, "Sometimes if they don't like somebody they'll say something to them. They just want to mark their turf."

On Thursday, Gonzales and fellow technician Jaime Fiesco spent a few minutes scrubbing the name "Brink" off a city parking structure wall in the alley between Wilshire and California Avenue near Third Street. But the citrus cleanser and wire brush didn't erase the green paint, so the technicians went to plan B.

They went to their truck, mixed up a shade of paint that matched the wall and "Brink" was no more.

"We try to get rid of it as quick as we can," Stoll said. "The strategy is that if you get it off quick, they'll get frustrated and stop."

Crews clean both public and private properties. Anyone who sees graffiti can leave a message on the city's hotline at (310) 458-2231 and it will be removed within a few days. Stoll said the hotline is checked two to three times a day. If a person wants graffiti removed from private property, they must leave a name and number so the city can have the property owner sign a consent form so the city isn't held liable for work done.

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Watch for future newsstands at a location near you!

STATE

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Property owner wanted for Promenade task force

By Daily Press staff

The Santa Monica City Council wants more restaurants and less retail on the Third Street Promenade, but it needs help on how to go about it. The city is taking applications for those who want to be on a task force that will recommend what an appropriate mix is on the outdoor mall.

The task force will meet over a 12-month period, at least once a month and possibly more, in the evenings and occasionally on weekends. Three council members, one planning commissioner, two representatives from the Bayside District and one member who owns or controls property on the Third Street Promenade will make up the task force.

All persons who own or control property on the Third Street Promenade are invited to apply for membership on the task force regardless of race, age, sex, religion, marital status, national origin, ancestry, sexual preference, or disability.

The appointment of one member will be made by council at an open city council meeting.

The applications will become public records and will be available for public inspection or duplication. Applications will be filed with the director of planning and community development by Feb. 25. Additional information may be submitted, but a resume cannot be substituted for the application.

Applications can be mailed to director of planning and community development, 1685 Main Street, Room 212, Santa Monica, CA, 90401 or hand delivered to the same address. Mailed applications must be delivered to the city by February. Any questions, contact Andrew Agle at (310) 458-2275.

City wants input on ADA evaluation report

By Daily Press staff

The City of Santa Monica has released its draft report of the 2000 Americans with Disabilities Act Departmental Self Evaluation. The report is based on a survey of program and service accessibility to people with disabilities, and is used to identify barriers to access and develop solutions for addressing them.

The city is seeking public comment on the report and the findings on which it is based. Copies of the report, the survey and supporting historical documents can be obtained at all Santa Monica public libraries, City Hall in the Human Services Division (Room 212) and online at http://santa-monica.org/ccs/hsd/disability/2001SelfEval/index.htm.

To request the document in a different format, contact Janet Hand at 458-8701 or e-mail janet-hand@santa-monica.org. The deadline for comments is Feb. 21. Comments may be submitted via e-mail or regular mail sent to:

Janet Hand
Human Services Division
City of Santa Monica
1685 Main St., Rm. 212
Santa Monica CA 90401

SAMOHI students urged to give 'the gift of life'

By Daily Press staff

Santa Monica High teacher Jamie Jiminez knows first hand that sometimes it takes the experience of a loss for others to benefit. It's a philosophy that he's now sharing with his students who are joining him in rolling up their sleeves and giving the gift of life to the Santa Monica community by donating platelets at Saint John's Health Center.

"My friend's daughter passed away after a struggle with Leukemia, and my wife and I began donating platelets in her memory," said Jiminez, the social studies department chairperson at Santa Monica High School. "For the past three years, I have been donating platelets and feel good about sacrificing a little of myself to help others."

Some of his students have adopted his mantra and see how helping the community can help themselves. By donating platelets, the students receive credit for the community service component of their social studies class from Jiminez. Photos of the students who donate platelets are displayed on a bulletin board in Saint John's Health Center's Blood Donation Center.

"In my social studies class, I help my students realize that they are members of the community and have a responsibility to Santa Monica to make where they live a better place," he said. "I can't think of a better way to contribute to the community than by donating blood or platelets."

Saint John's Health Center's Blood Donation Center accepts whole blood and platelet donations from healthy individuals who are 17 and older, weigh at leat 110 pounds and have not ingested aspirin or products containing aspirin, ibuprofen or anti-inflammatory medications three days prior to donating blood.

Whole blood or platelet donation is a painless procedure that takes one hour or about 90 minutes, respectively. During the donation, donors can watch a movie or T.V. show, listen to music or sleep.

For more information or to schedule an appointment to donate blood, please call (310) 829-8025.

NATIONAL

Unemployment rate falls to 5.6 percent in January

BY JEANNINE AVERSA
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Nearly 1 million discouraged people suspended their job searches in January, producing an unexpected drop in the nation's unemployment rate.

Even though there are mounting signs of an economic recovery, economists believe the rate will rise again as cautious companies delay rehiring laid-off workers.

The jobless rate dipped to 5.6 percent, a 0.2-percentage-point decrease from December, the Labor Department reported Friday. But that occurred because the labor force shrank by 924,000 — not because employment went up.

As a result, the government's official unemployment figure, which counts only those actively looking for jobs, fell to 7.9 million in January.

"People were so discouraged that they just stopped looking for a job and left the labor force, which is not a positive thing, and that understated the unemployment rate," said Stuart Hoffman, chief economist at PNC Financial Services Group. "It will take a while for the recovery to reach Main Street in the form of more jobs."

Economists said the unemployment rate, considered a lagging economic indicator, will resume rising in the months ahead. They predicted it would climb as high as 6.5 percent by June, hold steady for a while and then start to fall near the end of this year or at the beginning of 2003 as the economic recovery gains momentum.

The ailing economy, which fell into recession in March, has forced production cutbacks and thousands of layoffs and taken a big bite out of corporate profits.

"Companies are not going to commit to adding workers until their bottom lines stabilize," said Carl Tannenbaum, chief economist at LaSalle Bank/ABN AMRO.

On Wall Street, stocks retreated as investors collected their wins from a two-day rally. The Dow Jones industrial average closed down 12.74 points at 9,907.26.

Even discounting the statistical quirk which caused the jobless rate to fall, analysts said there were encouraging signs that the massive job losses seen after the Sept. 11 terror attacks are abating.

A separate survey of businesses showed that they cut their payrolls by 89,000 workers in January, an improvement from the 311,000 employees that were cut, on average, in October, November and December.

"After losing hundreds of thousands of jobs each month for the past four months, losing only 89,000 jobs in January is actually good news even if it doesn't feel that great," said Bill Cheney, chief economist at John Hancock. "The pace of job losses appears to be slowing."

President Bush, who wants Congress to pass an economic stimulus plan, offered a cautious assessment of the employment report. "There are some positive numbers but not enough positive numbers to satisfy me," he told reporters.

Mark Zandi, chief economist for Economy.com, said that about 100,000 jobs need to be added to payrolls each month for the unemployment rate to start to decline on a sustained basis.

Another report Friday suggested that the battered manufacturing sector, hardest hit by the recession, may be seeing better days ahead.

The Institute for Supply Management said its index of business activity rose to 49.9 in January from 48.1 the month before. An index above 50 indicates manufacturing growth.

While the employment report showed that factories lost 89,000 more jobs last month, it was the smallest decline since September.

A third report from the Commerce Department showed that construction activity, which has held up well during the slump thanks to low interest rates, edged up 0.2 percent in December, powered by spending on condominiums and apartments.

For all of 2001, construction spending rose 5.8 percent, following a 6.8 percent increase in 2000. While last year's performance marked the weakest showing for builders since 1995, it was still considered solid for a recession.

Priest in Florida pleads guilty to drug charges

BY BILL KACZOR
Associated Press Writer

PENSACOLA, Fla. — A Roman Catholic priest accused of dealing drugs from the rectory pleaded guilty Friday to federal charges.

The Rev. Thomas Crandall, 47, could get five to 40 years in prison at sentencing April 17.

He pleaded guilty to conspiring to possess with intent to distribute methamphetamine and the drug Ecstasy.

The pastor of St. Rose of Lima Church in Milton came under investigation in December after an informant identified the priest as his drug supplier.

He was arrested Jan. 12 after agents found some 900 Esctasy tablets and methamphetamine in his sport utility vehicle and at the St. Rose rectory.

Crandall admitted dealing drugs from the rectory and at his Bourbon Street condominium in New Orleans.

He was placed on administrative leave after his arrest.

In a statement Friday, the Pensacola-Tallahassee Diocese said that Crandall's arrest caused "pain and disappointment," but that it supported "the work of law enforcement personnel and the judicial system in addressing the problem of illegal drugs."

Authorities search for Texas escapees in rural Oklahoma

BY TIM TALLEY
Associated Press Writer

TERRAL, Okla. — Police looking for four Texas prison escapees focused on southern Oklahoma late Friday after tying them to a burglary and briefly chasing a stolen pickup truck believed to be carrying the suspects.

A sheriff's dispatcher said the chase took place on rural roads in Jefferson County, just across the Red River from Texas and only about 30 miles from the jail they escaped from Monday. Authorities eventually lost track of the truck.

The escapees include two convicted killers and two others awaiting trial on murder charges. Authorities said they believed the four were armed with a pistol stolen from an area home on Friday, along with the truck.

Police helicopters and patrol cars continued the search late Friday, and authorities set up a roadblock in the nearby town of Ryan.

"There's a lot of activity, a lot of searching going on around here," Ryan Fire Chief David Underwood said.

The inmates broke out of the Montague County (Texas) Jail on Monday, overpowering a guard with a homemade knife. Authorities say they drove off in the guard's sport utility vehicle.

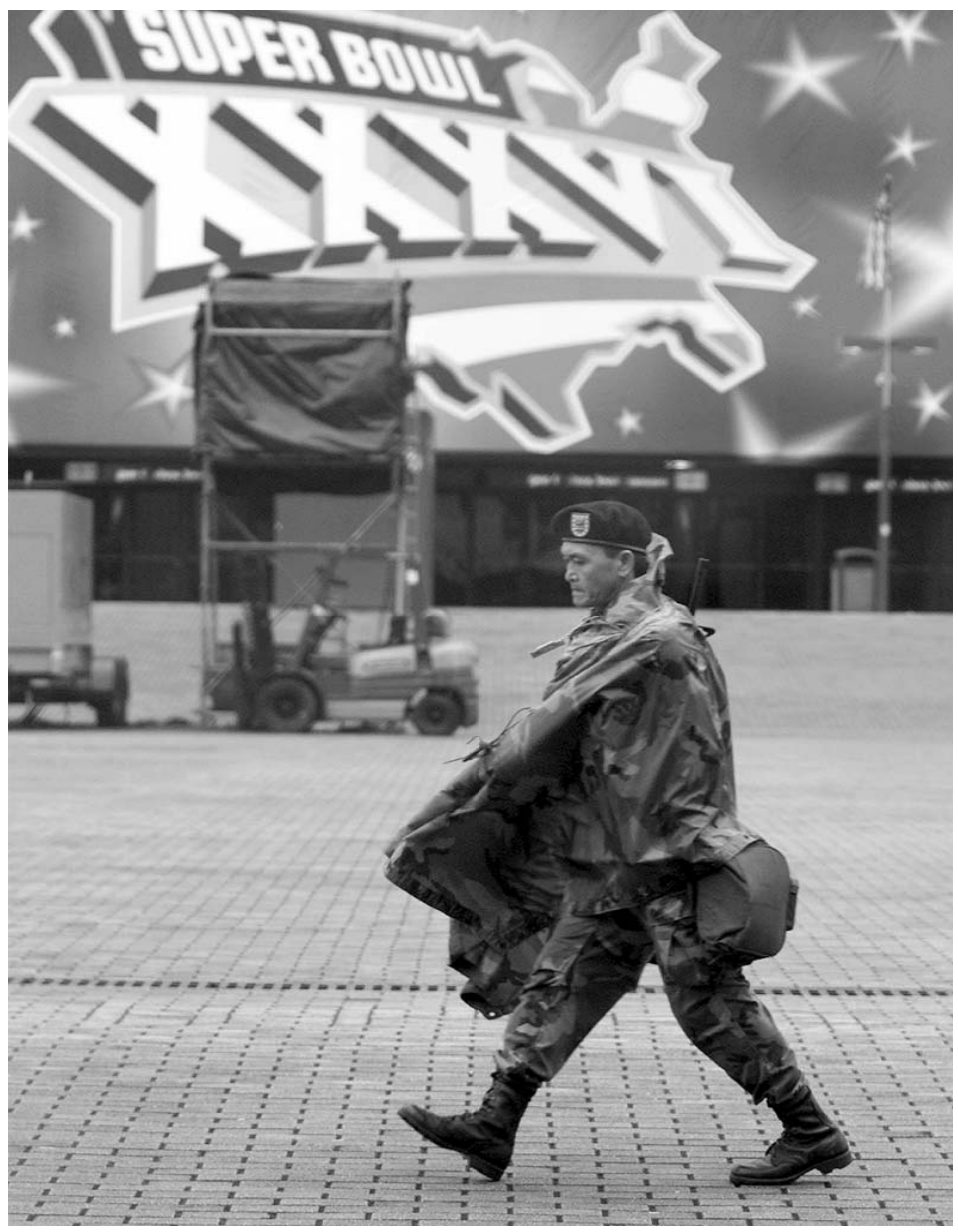
All the fugitives are from the region. Authorities identified them as Curtis Gambill, 24, of Terral; Joshua Bagwell, 23, of Waurika; and Chrystal Gale Soto, 22, and Charles Jordan, 30, both of Bowie, Texas.

Bagwell and Gambill were serving life sentences for the 1996 shotgun killing of a Waurika High School cheerleader. The others were awaiting trial on charges of murdering an elderly couple.

Authorities said Gambill knew the occupants of the house that was burglarized Friday. They were not home at the time.

"There's a high likelihood these escapees were involved in it," said Tim Cole, district attorney for Montague County.

Authorities said the escapees may have been sighted Wednesday in Duncan, about 40 miles north of Terral. A motorist said he saw Bagwell, an acquaintance from high school, at a convenience store there.



Michael Conroy/Associated Press

A Louisiana National Guardsman walks past the Louisiana Superdome on Friday in New Orleans. The Super Bowl, always security conscious, is now a "National Special Security Event." This year's game, which was pushed back from Jan. 27 to Feb. 3, will be as tightly locked down as any of the nation's military installations.

COMICS

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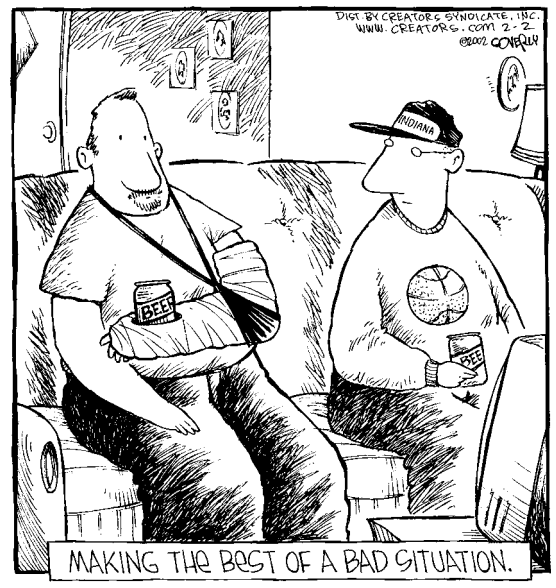
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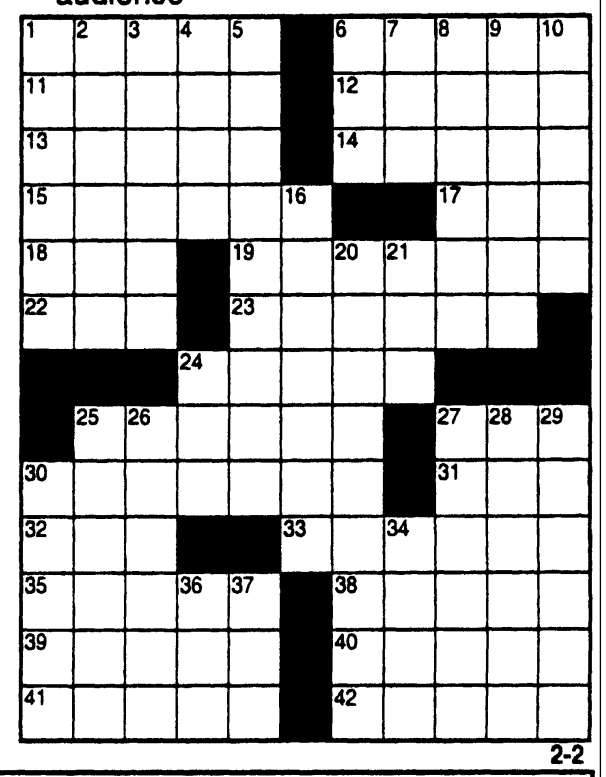
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12 Without help
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14 Joe of "Goodfellas"
15 Old deliverer
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22 Pig holder
23 Prompt
24 Food fishes
25 Control
27 Swiss peak
30 Established
31 Southern resort
32 Lobe spot
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35 Pueblo material
38 Tolerate
39 Turn red, perhaps
40 Beau
41 Watermelon waste
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DOWN

1 Potok and others
2 Jazz aficionado
3 Blood conduit
4 Rose feature
5 "Cantos" poet
6 Upper limit
7 Heady brew
8 American marsupial
9 Call from the audience
10 Paris divider
16 Kin of au pairs
20 Be proud
21 Frank McCourt book
24 Badge material
25 Band aide
26 Atlas section
27 Come in
28 German songs
29 Tough puzzles
30 Phobias
34 Orchestra member
36 Garden area
37 Print units

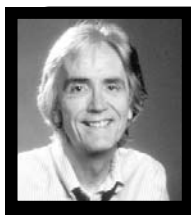
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2-2

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NEWS OF THE WEIRD

by Chuck Shepard

Father asks judge to increase child support payments

The Los Angeles Times reported in January that the ex-wife of casino mogul Kirk Kerkorian had recently filed a petition claiming that the $50,000 a month in child support Kerkorian pays for his 3-year-old daughter is insufficient and asking a Los Angeles judge to up the amount to $320,000 a month. Included as little Kira's requirements are $144,000 a month for travel, $14,000 for parties (her first-birthday party cost $70,000), $10,200 for food (about $340 per meal), and $7,000 a month for little Kira to give back to the community (in charitable donations).

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BACK PAGE

Groundhog upstaged by dolphins and a whale

BY CHELSEA J. CARTER
Associated Press Writer

LAGUNA BEACH — California's answer to Punxsutawney Phil, the famed groundhog weather prophet, was upstaged Friday by a pod of dolphins and a migrating whale.

Organizers of Laguna Beach's first Groundhog Day celebration had hoped Laguna Larry's appearance a day before his Pennsylvania counterpart would steal some of the spotlight.

But a large pod of dolphins swimming close to shore and a gray whale spouting in the distance snared the attention of onlookers. A seal also made an appearance, bobbing in the ocean a few feet from shore.

Laguna Larry "has a little competition," said Jackie Navarro, owner of Wild Wonders, an animal compound where the groundhog resides.

Mayor Wayne Baglin said the coastal community, about 60 miles south of Los Angeles, had enough room for all species.

"It adds to Laguna Beach's rich diversity," he said wryly.

But the groundhog didn't seem to care about the lack of attention. The 7-pound animal baked in the sun, which was casting long shadows, for a few minutes before being put in a hold in the sand.

"Our climate could be a problem for accurate predictions."

— WAYNE BAGLIN
Laguna Beach mayor

Although it was only a temporary home, the groundhog appeared to have little problem adjusting to the hole. He didn't come out.

Navarro had to reach into the hole to pull the groundhog out.

As a result, it was not clear what the groundhog saw in the sand. Legend says if a groundhog sees his shadow, winter will stick around for six more weeks. If he misses his shadow, spring is supposed to be near.

In an added, albeit commercial twist, Mazda said it would let the groundhog decide the shade of its 2002 Miata — sunblaze yellow or stormy gray.

His prediction, according to Navarro and Baglin, was an early spring and a yellow car.

"Our climate could be a problem for accurate predictions," Baglin said. He added February is typically the rainiest month.

But the groundhog's prediction was good news for some California residents after a recent cold snap saw snow in Malibu and near freezing temperatures along the coast.

"I hope he's right," said Tracie LaMee of San Juan Capistrano. LaMee brought her daughter and a teen-age friend to see her first groundhog.

But 14-year-old Allison Wiltse of Dana Point was more interested in the dolphins.

"I hope they come back," she said.

Lovers found in avalanche rescue, lose lives in another

By The Associated Press

EDMONDS, Wash. — Ten years ago, Georgia Lynne Bakke helped rescue Lawrence Gordon Duff after an avalanche in Canada broke both his legs.

They fell in love, married and never lost their appetite for backcountry skiing. They were skiing earlier this week when an avalanche in the Selkirk Range of British Columbia claimed both their lives, along with that of a third skier, Susan Majeski McKnight, 53.

Bakke, a metallurgical engineer, was celebrating her 42nd birthday. Duff, a paralegal, was 54.

Jeff Gfroerer, a licensed guide and manager of the cabins where the skiers were staying, said he warned the group not to venture onto the slopes.

"It was a beautiful day," he said Wednesday, "but we'd just had five days of very intense weather, a lot of snow."

The group arrived by helicopter at the cabins at the 7,000-foot level near Kaslo, about 30 miles north of the U.S. border.

They left with radio signal beacons, avalanche probes, shovels and gear for climbing. Bakke, Duff and McKnight were down a few hundred feet when another skier in their group kicked off to follow, apparently triggering the slide.

"It was massive," Gfroerer said. "I've rarely seen a slide of that magnitude."

McKnight, a nurse, had been on several other outings with Bakke and Duff, said her husband, Stanley.

"They were not reckless people," he said. "They were taking a calculated risk, which is there with many sports and is true with backcountry skiing. The reality is that there is always avalanche danger in the winter."

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