WEEKEND EDITION

Santa Monica Daily Press

February 11-12, 2006 | A newspaper with issues | Volume 5, Issue 78

DAILY LOTTERY

SUPER LOTTO
2 3 6 9 35
Meganumber: 1
Jackpot: $13 Million

FANTASY 5
21 22 24 31 32

DAILY 3
Daytime: 4 3 4
Evening: 2 5 3

DAILY DERBY
1st: 05 California Classic
2nd: 07 Eureka!
3rd: 09 Winning Spirit

RACE TIME: 1:41.17

Although every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the winning number information, mistakes can occur. In the event of any discrepancies, California State laws and California Lottery regulations will prevail. Complete game information and prize claiming instructions are available at California Lottery retailers. Visit the California State Lottery web site: http://www.calottery.com

NEWS OF THE WEIRD
BY CHUCK SHEPARD

Adding to the list of stories that were formerly weird but which now occur with such frequency that they must be retired from circulation: (75) People who are so enticed by the money they can make selling scrap-metal copper that they break into electrical substations to steal wire, at night, and touch the wrong thing, as the man did in Bellmead, Texas, two days before Christmas. (He "never even knew what hit him," said a utility employee.) (76) And animals in mating season (especially deer) that crash into homes and storefronts in their crazed search for sex, as did deer that appeared in January in an Evansville, Ind., video store and an Arkansas City, Kan., elementary school.

TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is the 42nd day of 2006. There are 323 days left in the year.

On Feb. 11, 1945, President Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Soviet leader Josef Stalin signed the Yalta Agreement during World War II.

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Boardwalk braces for peacemakers

BY RYAN HYATT
Daily Press Staff Writer

VENICE BOARDWALK — Community activists are optimistic that efforts to manage the free spirit of this 1.5-mile stretch may prove more successful by this summer than it has in recent years.

In particular, they anticipate boardwalk "peacemakers" becoming a reality.

The peacemakers would be a team trained in conflict resolution and assigned to settle territorial disputes among those vying for space along the renowned boardwalk. The group's power would come from community consent. However, if successful, the peacemakers might prove to be an effective first line of defense, handling situations before the police are called in.

It's hoped the peacemakers may be assisting with boardwalk issues in time for this summer's tourist season, said Stephen Friske, a Venice resident and musician who

See **BOARDWALK**, page 12

Fabian Lewkowicz/Daily Press

COME TOGETHER: David Lasker, 36, paints the 'Abbey Road' album cover recently on the Venice Beach boardwalk. A new ordinance aimed at eliminating commercial activity on the west side of the boardwalk should help ensure that artists and expressionists have ample room along the popular 1.5-mile stretch.

Optimists being tested

Century-old community service group hopes to pass the torch to next generation

BY KEVIN HERRERA
Daily Press Staff Writer

DOWNTOWN — Optimism is apparently waning in Santa Monica, or at least any organized form of it.

Since 1924, the Optimist Club of Santa Monica has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars through raffles, ballroom dances and silent auctions, all to help children in need create healthier lives for themselves. But the tables have turned somewhat recently as optimists, many since retired, have had to cut back the number of hours they volunteer and are now turning to the very youth they've helped for assistance.

The optimists are characteristically hopeful a younger generation will pick up the torch by joining the club and keeping the legacy of optimism alive for future generations.

"We are a small organization and as much as we do, it's still not enough," said Donna Lady, president of the local chapter, during an optimist lunch at the Fairmont Miramar Hotel in which roughly a dozen members celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Optimist Youth Home, a foster home for troubled kids in Highland Park. Members of the club presented a check for $2,000 to representatives from the group home, for a total pledge of $5,000.

"It feels as if we are dog-paddling as fast as we can," Lady added. "We need to attract younger members, but that has been very hard to do, not just for us. Every organization is having trouble."

On the international level, optimists are concerned about shrinking membership as their ranks grow older.

"It is a major concern and one

See **OPTIMISTS**, page 13

LOCAL

Gunned down suspect was Venice resident

By Daily Press staff

LOS ANGELES — The carjacking suspect shot dead by Santa Monica police on Thursday has been identified, but the cause of his death won't be known until an autopsy is conducted this weekend, according to the Los Angeles Coroner's Office.

Jeffery Smith, 23, of Venice, was shot by SMPD officers shortly after 5 a.m. on Thursday after he fired at police with a shotgun. Minutes earlier, he stole a car at gunpoint from a man driving on Michigan Avenue in Santa

See **SUSPECT SHOT**, page 10

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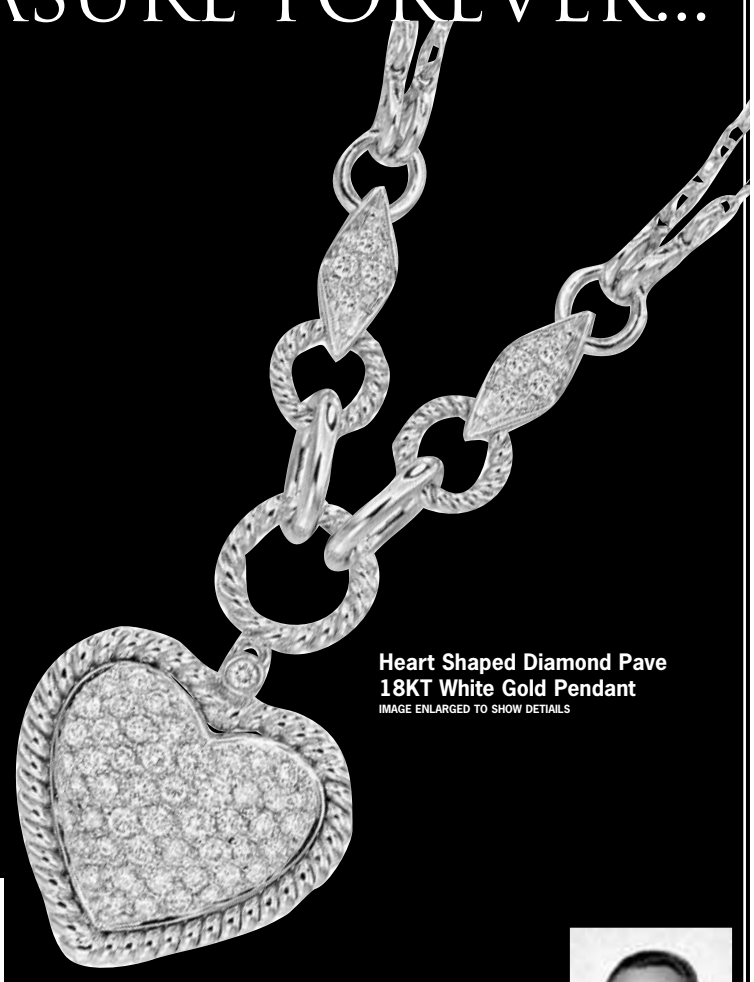

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HOROSCOPES

Easy does it, Cancer

Santa Monica Daily Press

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)
★★★★★ Allow your creativity to flourish, and you'll come up with ideas. Something you have wanted to make happen becomes possible. Someone might lean on you a bit too much for your taste. Work with the situation. Tonight: Follow your imagination. A child might be unduly serious.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
★★★ Let a family member have his or her head space. You might not always understand what this person wants. At the moment, more privacy fits the bill. This person wants downtime. Don't let his or her attitude get to you. Tonight: Order in.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20)
★★★★ You might want to be more happy and easygoing, but others seem to rain on your parade. You might want to clear out or do something very different. Give yourself permission to do so. Loosen up. Tonight: At a movie.

CANCER (June 21-July 22)
★★★★ You could easily cause yourself a lot of trouble. Why? Don't overspend, but at the same time, don't exaggerate the feeling that money is tight. You might want to take a look at your bills before you make any decisions. Tonight: Easy does it.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)
★★★★★ You could be harder than you realize on others and, for that matter, on yourself. Pull back and work on being the jovial Lion. The limelight is on you. Use it well. Others willingly follow your lead. Tonight: Easy does it.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)
★★ You could be a bit low and sad. Sometimes you take others way too seriously. Today is an example. You will be much happier if you kick back and take some private time. Take a walk or enjoy a good book. Tonight: Just for you!

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)
★★★★ You might not always like what a dear friend shares. You will be happiest if you don't overreact. Could you be becoming rigid in certain ways? Be honest with yourself. You also might want to join more jovial people. Tonight: Follow the action.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)
★★★ You must respond to a dear friend who can sometimes act like or actually be quite an authority figure. You might not be as pleased with your plans as you would like. Do what you must to free up your afternoon. Tonight: Your time.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)
★★★★ Plans could change, and you might not be happy at first. If you don't get caught up in the details, you will be fine. Look at what you would like to do with this extra free time. New plans could be fun. Tonight: Where there is music.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)
★★★★★ A partner could be demanding. You, on the other hand, might want to get a firm grasp on your taxes. Think positively about a situation, deciding how much you can squeeze into one day. Tonight: Opt for some special time with a loved one.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)
★★★★ Sometimes you are not as sure of yourself as you would like. Right now, another's attitude could impact you. Don't worry; flow with others' plans. You could be very happy with the outcome. Tonight: Say yes.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)
★★★ You might want to think about getting into a project and clearing out extra work. You don't have to make everything a chore. If you want to be lazy, do that. Remember, you don't always need to answer to others. Tonight: Nothing too strenuous!

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LOCAL

You've been served

Laura Lewkowicz/Special to the Daily Press

Recent graduates of the Santa Monica Police Department's Citizen Police Academy pose for a picture at their graduation ceremony at Shutters on the Beach this week. The academy is a 12-week course that is offered to residents who want to learn more about the police department. (From left to right) Front row: Marty Katz, Flavio Valadez, Jeanne Laurie, Dora McCarty, Ruby Neumann, Michele Christensen, Christy Palodichuk, Richard Lopez and Dick Kirschner. Back row: Gary Flora, Ben Davenport, Michael Keller, David Perkins, SMPD Deputy Chief Phil Sanchez, class coordinator Lauralee Asch, Gerardo Flores, Stephen Harrington, Dan Palodichuk, Masa Alkire, Fabian Lewkowicz, SMDP Capt. Jacqueline Seabrooks and SMPD Capt. Wendell Shirley.

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Assembly candidates face the public

By Daily Press staff

The public is encouraged to attend an open forum this weekend with the five candidates running for the 41st Assembly District seat. The free forum is scheduled for Sunday, Feb. 12. from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Colorado Center community room.

Sponsored by the Americans for Democratic Action, the forum will allow voters to see and speak with the candidates in person to help them make an informed decision rather than evaluate candidates largely upon the brief soundbites playing on television and radio.

Five candidates — Julia Brownley, Barry Groveman, Kelly Hayes-Rait, Jonathan Levy and Shawn Casey O'Brien — are vying for the seat being vacated Assemblymember Fran Pavley.

The 41st Assembly District encapsulates 70 miles of coastline running between Oxnard and Santa Monica, including parts of the West Valley, Pacific Palisades and Brentwood.

The Colorado Center community room is located on the north side of Broadway at 25th Street. There is free parking available on the street and under the building on the top level of the Yahoo! Center garage on Colorado Avenue between Cloverfield Boulevard and 26th Street.

Heavy metal thunder: Dumping waste can be hazardous

By Daily Press staff

The California Department of Toxic Substances Control has announced new waste disposal rules affecting households and small businesses that went into effect

See **BRIEFS**, page 10

SNOW AND SURF REPORTS

CONDITIONS DATA PROVIDED BY ONTHESNOW.COM

BEAR MOUNTAIN

NEW SNOW (24 Hrs)	BASE DEPTH	LIFT HOURS	RUNS OPEN	LIFTS OPEN
0"	12"-36"	8:30am - 4:00pm	18	10/12

CONDITIONS: Machine Made, Machine Groomed, Hard Packed, Wet

JUNE MOUNTAIN

NEW SNOW (24 Hrs)	BASE DEPTH	LIFT HOURS	RUNS OPEN	LIFTS OPEN
0"	72" - 96"	8:00am - 4:00pm	35	6/6

CONDITIONS: Packed Powder, Machine Groomed

MAMMOTH MOUNTAIN

NEW SNOW (24 Hrs)	BASE DEPTH	LIFT HOURS	RUNS OPEN	LIFTS OPEN
0"	120- 144"	8:30 am - 4:00 pm	150	25/28

CONDITIONS: Packed Powder, Machine Groomed

MOUNTAIN HIGH

NEW SNOW (24 Hrs)	BASE DEPTH	LIFT HOURS	RUNS OPEN	LIFTS OPEN
0"	12"-24"	8:30 am - 10:00 pm	16	8/16

CONDITIONS: Machine Made, Machine Groomed, Hard Packed, Wet

MT. BALDY

NEW SNOW (24 Hrs)	BASE DEPTH	LIFT HOURS	RUNS OPEN	LIFTS OPEN
0"	12"-12"	8:00 am - 4:30 pm	0	0/4

CONDITIONS: Packed Powder, Machine Made

SNOW SUMMIT

NEW SNOW (24 Hrs)	BASE DEPTH	LIFT HOURS	RUNS OPEN	LIFTS OPEN
0"	12"-36"	4:30 am - 4:30 pm	18	14/14

CONDITIONS: Machine Made, Machine Groomed, Hard Packed, Wet

SNOW VALLEY

NEW SNOW (24 Hrs)	BASE DEPTH	LIFT HOURS	RUNS OPEN	LIFTS OPEN
0"	24"-12"	8:30 am - 4:00 pm	10	5/11

CONDITIONS: Machine Groomed, Spring

CONDITIONS WATER TEMP: 59°

DATA PROVIDED BY WETSAND.COM

SWELL FORECAST (3-7 FT)

This weekend is looking like a small to moderate NW day as left over NW swell still lingers and some forerunners from our next swell start to fill in. Overall, size is expected to reach in the waist to chest high range for AM sessions with some pluses at times when the tide is right, which will be an issue on Sunday. To see the tide table for your area, click here. Note that size may increase a bit late in the day as our next NW swell approaches the region.

LONG RANGE SYNOPSIS

NW swell hits coast end of mid-weekend...
Tracking smaller NW for weekend of 18th..

TIDE FORECAST FOR SANTA MONICA

SATURDAY:				
LOW TIDE	1:52AM	2.1FT	3:03PM	-0.8FT
HIGH TIDE	7:55AM	5.8FT	9:31PM	4.0FT
SUNDAY:				
LOW TIDE	2:24AM	1.8FT	3:27PM	-0.7FT
HIGH TIDE	8:27AM	5.8FT	9:51PM	4.0FT
MONDAY:				
LOW TIDE	2:54AM	1.6FT	3:49PM	-0.5FT
HIGH TIDE	8:27AM	5.8FT	9:51PM	4.0FT
TUESDAY:				
LOW TIDE:	3:26AM	1.5FT	4:11PM	-0.2FT
HIGH TIDE:	9:26AM	5.4FT	10:31PM	4.2FT
WEDNESDAY:				
LOW TIDE:	3:59AM	1.4FT	4:30PM	0.1FT
HIGH TIDE:	9:56AM	5.0FT	10:52PM	4.3FT
THURSDAY:				
LOW TIDE:	4:36AM	1.4FT	4:49PM	0.5FT
HIGH TIDE:	10:27AM	4.5FT	11:14PM	4.4FT

FRIDAY:
N/A

SURF AND SNOW QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS? EMAIL ALEX@SMDP.COM

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OPINION

The Q Line

Waves Of Support For Cleaner Coast

This past week, Q-line asked:

What are you willing to pay for a cleaner coast?

Here are your responses:

✆ "Coastal waters would never have gotten to the deplorable state they are at if the city had enforced the regulations on the books for years. They should have listened to the suggestions of people like Heal the Bay as to find better ways to control and improve water quality and beach cleanliness. Once again the city's negligence is going to cost the taxpayers even more money. I'm not willing to pay anything. Let the city's money to the bums pay for it. Use that money to clean up what was beautiful coastline for the citizens."

✆ "Some 50 years ago the Hyperion sewage treatment facility was constructed for the purpose of filtering the sewage flow of the few million people, who at that time resided in Los Angeles County. The sewer pipeline carrying treated sewage only extends five miles out to sea, an adequate distance at that time. However, foresight indicated that the sewage pipeline should have extended 25 miles out to sea. Then as now, the cost was prohibitive. The geography of the Santa Monica Bay enables the treated sewage to flow from the five-mile pipeline back into the bay. I personally would not spend a dime to cleaning up the coast due to the only solution being less people making the mess."

✆ "Paying a small tax would be so beneficial to Santa Monica in cleaning up the beach. The beach and the water bring in such a huge amount of tourist dollars to Santa Monica and you sell something that is not usable. Look at Orange County and how many times they had to close their beaches. Santa Monica is very fortunate in the fact that we don't have to do that. I think a reasonable amount, as long as it is going solely to beach clean up would be so beneficial."

✆ "Maybe property values in LA have made us all millionaires on paper, yet that is only if we sell out and move to Iraq. In the meantime, our worthless city staff dreams up more exorbitant schemes to fleece us. Let's flush the entire city staff down the storm drains and use this money for the clean up."

✆ "I am willing to pay a little more for a cleaner coast but one thing has to happen before that. We have to go to all these surrounding cities like West LA and Culver City, and see how all their water gutters are covered with junk. Something needs to be done about that since it greatly contributes to the environmental disaster we are experiencing on our coasts."

✆ "Wow, hold onto your wallets. We are in for a hosing. The water is not that bad to swim in. Certainly not $95 million bad. Where is LA County, the state and federal money on this supposed problem? Most problems in this town are magnified disproportionate to reality. City Hall is where the clean up is needed."

✆ "I am willing to pay absolutely nothing. Those responsible should pay for cleaning up the beaches and coastal waters. It is not Hummer-owners, meat-eaters, and others. The coast needs cleaning up because there is a lot of junk going into the ocean. Each person contributes to that. More people means more junk. Those responsible are those who contribute to overpopulation. Whatever the cause, it is a lost cause without population control."

✆ "I think we shouldn't have to pay for cleaning up the beaches. Those who litter should have to pay. $500 fines for littering would bring in revenue for the city and beaches would remain clean."

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Santa Monica Daily Press

Galaxy quest should include keeping Pluto

MODERN TIMES

BY LLOYD GARVER

Last year, astronomers discovered a "tenth planet." This new planet is similar to, but slightly larger than Pluto. All of this is exciting news, but not without controversy. Now, some scientists say that it's not a "real planet," and neither is Pluto. They want to take away the planet designation from Pluto and just say that it's a bunch of ice, and part of something called "The Kuiper Belt."

One of the problems is that there is no official definition of "planet." Personally, I like the following definition: "The nine heavenly bodies that you had to memorize in elementary school plus any new planets that are subsequently discovered are officially planets."

Apparently, I'm not alone in this definition. Dr. Frank Bertoldi of the Max Plank Institute is in favor of declaring the "tenth planet," 2003 UB313, a new planet, and keeping Pluto a planet, too. He says that to downgrade Pluto to a non-planet would be "impolite." Perhaps a more important group, school children, agrees with him. When it was learned that a new model of the solar system at the American Museum of Natural History in New York leaves out Pluto, kids began a letter-writing campaign urging the museum to reinstate Pluto.

Don't worry about having to memorize the name 2003 UB313. If it's declared an official planet, it will have a name based on a god of mythology like the other planets. Those who discovered it have given it a temporary name, "Xena," named after the TV show heroine. I guess if it had been discovered this year, they would have called it "Earl," or referred to it and its moon as "Desperate Housewives."

My objection to downgrading Pluto to a "thing" from a planet is based more on emotion than science. I've always had a special feeling towards the other planets in our solar system, and I don't want to start being condescending towards good old Pluto. Like so many people, I've wondered if there is life on other planets, and certainly Pluto was one of those planets that was in my imagination. When I was a kid, it was one of my favorite planets. I thought that it was named for a Disney character, and assumed if they ever found another planet, they'd name it "Goofy."

Just because some scientists with fancy degrees say Pluto's not really a planet doesn't make it so. These guys have made mistakes before. When I was a kid, Uranus was pronounced "Your-anus," which, of course, made some of us more immature kids giggle. So, what did the scientists do? They changed the pronunciation to "Urine-us," so kids are still giggling. Anybody who could make a silly decision like that could be just as far off base as the anti-Pluto faction.

Maybe the best perspective to give those scientists who want to downgrade Pluto to a non-planet is to put the space shoe on the other foot. How would they feel if the evidence of some scientists, or some new definition of "planet" meant that Earth was no longer a planet? I'd be pretty depressed about that. I've been going along my whole life, feeling rather cocky, believing that I live on one of nine planets in the solar system, and then all of a sudden, some guys are telling me that it's not really a planet. It's just a bunch of water and dirt that revolves around the sun.

How would the children react to that? "Mars and Jupiter are planets, boys and girls, but we live on, well, something that isn't quite as important."

It would put an end to all those science fiction movies in which life forms are found on other planets and they come into conflict with Earthlings. Believe me, if we're reduced to non-planet status, Martians, Venutians, and Jupiterians aren't even going to bother with us anymore. And in the distant future, don't expect non-planet Earth to be asked to join any interplanetary governing body like the Union of Solar System Planets. We'd just be a non-voting place that would have to go along with the majority.

So, let's not be too rash here. Let's not risk hurting the feelings of the things that may live on Pluto. If this new discovery is similar to Pluto, call it a planet, too, instead of ousting Pluto. I know they'll never really go for my childhood suggestion for a name for the new planet. But I also know to kick "Pluto" out of our family of planets is just plain "Goofy."

(Lloyd Garver has written for many television shows, ranging from "Sesame Street" to "Family Ties" to "Frasier." He also has read many books, some of them in hardcover. He writes the "Modern Times" column for CBSnews.com's opinion page and a weekly column for SportsLine.com. He can be reached at smdp@lloydgarvermoderntimes.com.)

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COMMENTARY

GUEST COMMENTARY **BY ONKAR GHATE**

Selfless behavior leads into darkness

To fathom our government's contemptible treatment of a handful of unbowed journalists, you must see the roots of that treatment in the moral ideal Christianity bequeathed the West.

In the face of the intimidation and murder of European authors, filmmakers and politicians by Islamic militants, a few European newspapers have the courage to defend their freedom of speech: They published 12 cartoons to test whether it's still possible to criticize Islam. They discovered it isn't. Muslims riot, burn embassies, and demand the censorship and death of infidels. The Danish cartoonists go into hiding — if they weren't afraid to speak before, they are now.

How do our leaders respond? Do they declare that an individual's freedom of speech is inviolable, no matter who screams offense at his ideas? No. Do they defend our right to life and pledge to hunt down anyone, anywhere, who abets the murder of a Westerner for having had the effrontery to speak? No — as they did not when the fatwa against Salman Rushdie was issued or his translators were attacked and murdered.

Instead, the U.S. government announces that although free speech is important, the government shares "the offense that Muslims have taken at these images," and even hints that it is disrespectful to publish them.

Why does a Muslim have a moral right to his dogmas, but we don't to our rational principles? Why, when journalists uphold free speech and Muslims respond with death threats, does the State Department signal out the journalists for moral censure? Why the vicious double standard? Why admonish the good to mollify evil?

The answer lies in the West's conception of morality.

Morality, we are told incessantly by secularists and religionists, the left and the right, means sacrifice — give up your values in selfless service to others. "Serve in a cause larger than your wants, larger than yourself," President Bush proclaims to a believing nation.

But when you surrender your values, are you to give them up for men you admire, for those you think have earned and deserve them? Obviously not — otherwise yours would be an act of trade, of justice, of self-assertiveness, not self-sacrifice.

You must give to that which you don't admire, to that which you judge to be unworthy, undeserving, irrational. An employee, for instance, must give up his job for a competitor he deems inferior; a businessman must contribute to ideological causes he opposes; a taxpayer must fund modern, unemployed "artists" whose feces-covered works he loathes; the United States must finance the UN, which it knows to be a pack of America-hating dictatorships.

To uphold your rational convictions is the most selfish of acts. To renounce them, to surrender the world to that which you judge to be irrational and evil, is the epitome of sacrifice. When Jesus, the great preacher of self-sacrifice, commanded "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you," he knew whereof he spoke.

In the left's adaptation of this perverse ideal, selfless surrender to evil translates into a foreign policy of self-loathing and "sensitivity," of spitting in America and the West's face while showing respect for the barbarisms of every gang.

Bill Clinton, for instance, certainly no radical leftist, jumped into the recent fray to castigate us: "None of us are totally free of stereotypes about people of different races, different ethnic groups, and different religions ... there was this appalling example in ... Denmark ... these totally outrageous cartoons against Islam."

In the right's version, selfless surrender to evil translates into a foreign policy of self-effacing service.

Our duty, Bush declares, is to bring the vote to Iraqis and Palestinians, but we dare not tell them what constitution to adopt, or ban the killers they want to vote for. We have no right to assert our principles because they are rational and good. But the Iraqis and Palestinians have a right to enact their tribal and terrorist beliefs at our expense, because their beliefs are irrational and evil. In the present crisis, the State Department will not defend free speech, because this principle is rationally defensible; to unequivocally assert this value would be selfish. But the department will suggest that we respectfully refrain from publishing cartoons that upset the mental lethargy of self-made slaves to authority. Muslims have a right to their mystical taboos, precisely because the beliefs are mystical.

Tonight, when you turn on the news and see hatred-seething hordes burning the West's flags and torching its embassies, remember that this is the enemy your morality commands you to love and serve — and remember the lonely Danes hiding in fear for their lives.

And then, in the ultimate act of self-assertiveness, pledge to renounce the morality of sacrifice and learn its opposite: the morality of rational self-interest.

Though the West's twilight has begun, the darkness of suicide has not yet engulfed us. We still have a chance.

(Dr. Onkar Ghate is a senior fellow at the Ayn Rand Institute in Irvine. The institute promotes the philosophy of Ayn Rand, author of "Atlas Shrugged" and "The Fountainhead.")

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STATE

STATE BRIEFS

'Blind' justice: Rapist convicted after TV appearance

By The Associated Press

VENTURA — A Santa Barbara man arrested after a rape victim spotted him on the television show "Blind Date" was sentenced to eight years in prison.

Ulrick Kevin "Ashwah" White, 32, was convicted by a jury on Dec. 13 of forcible rape and false imprisonment. Superior Court Judge Kevin McGee on Thursday sentenced White to the maximum penalty after noting White isn't remorseful about the 2003 rape.

"He doesn't believe that he raped this woman," McGee said, adding that White choked the victim into unconsciousness. The judge said White has no "appreciation or awareness of the severity of his conduct" and called him "a danger to society."

The judge said the recording of a 911 telephone call from the victim's cellular phone during the rape was a powerful piece of evidence in convicting White, the judge said. The victim is heard begging and pleading with White not to rape her.

"Anybody who has heard that tape recording will never forget it," the judge said.

The Ventura victim told police she recognized her attacker on TV and videotaped the "Blind Date" appearance of White, a handyman and private security guard. Her attacker had been sought since Sept. 6, 2003, when he allegedly approached the victim in a parking lot outside a Ventura bar as she was waiting for a cab, police Detective Russ Robinson said.

"He coaxes her into the car, she didn't really want to get in," Robinson said. "He initially headed in the direction of her home and then pulled off to a secluded area. That's when she started to believe that something bad was going to happen."

Welfare cheat proved a cash cow

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A convicted welfare cheat was sent to prison for violating probation after she bought a $700,000-plus house, installed a $45,000 pool and bought an SUV and motorcycle while paying only $2,500 toward her court-ordered $30,000 restitution.

Alvina Rankins, 41, of Palmdale also tried while on probation to get free school lunches for her three children and apparently had been running a loan mortgage business without a license, prosecutors said.

Rankins was convicted of welfare fraud in 2001 and was given a three-year suspended prison term and sentenced to a year in jail for illegally receiving welfare and Medi-Cal aid while doing child care.

As part of her probation, Rankins was ordered to pay the restitution to the best of her ability. But she only made $2,500 in payments in more than three years.

"Here was a woman who already obtained $30,000 in welfare aid she was not legally entitled to but continued to thumb her nose at the legal system," Deputy District Attorney Tamia Hope said.

Superior Court Judge Ann Jones ruled Wednesday that Rankins had violated the terms and conditions of her probation, was not amenable to another grant of probation, and sentenced her to three years in prison.

"She seems to write her own rules and doesn't take into account limitations put on her by the court," Hope said. "She was ordered to obey a handful of rules and failed to do so." Rankins was arrested Nov. 16 on suspicion of violating her probation after probation officers and sheriff's deputies searched her home.

Laptops of luxury: Pasadena computers not covered

By The Associated Press

POMONA — Auditors for overseers of the federal E-Rate program that connects low-income schools to the Internet said the Pasadena Unified School District's purchase of laptops was ineligible for funding. The program doesn't cover personal computers, the auditors said, and it was recommended the district and vendor Spectrum Communications of Corona repay $2.3 million.

"In this situation, both Spectrum and PUSD knew that end-user software was being installed on the laptops," the Universal Services Co. audit said. "Since both parties were in a position to prevent the rule violation, recovery will be directed against both parties."

The district bought the laptops through Spectrum in 2002, intending to use them as "mobile classroom servers." Nearly 90 percent of the $2.4 million purchase was funded through E-Rate.

The district intended the computers to be used as classroom servers on which teachers could monitor access to the Internet and transact assignments with students. E-Rate guidelines, however, state that "end-user" equipment is ineligible for funding.

Spectrum attorney Ryan Richardson said the company intends to appeal the decision with the Federal Communications Communication.

"We're not in complete agreement with their interpretation of the rules themselves," he said.

Merchant Marines find way onto memorial

By The Associated Press

CERRITOS — Merchant Marines are getting a spot on the city's proposed Armed Forces veterans memorial, but it won't be as prominent as the nation's five military branches. The City Council on Thursday voted approval of the original concept for the memorial, a 20-foot circular granite structure with five podiums for the five branches. In a move to end acrimony after the Merchant Marine was added to the design in November, the council decided contributions of merchant mariners who served under Naval command during World War II will be added somewhere on the monument.

STATE

Democrats differ from governor's priorities

BY TOM CHORNEAU
Associated Press Writer

SACRAMENTO — Assembly Democrats, critical to the success of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's $222 billion public works program, on Thursday questioned how the proposal's bond money would be repaid and said their spending priorities differed somewhat from the governor's.

The issues were raised in a news conference after Democrats returned from their annual retreat and marked the start of serious closed-door negotiations over Schwarzenegger's so-called strategic growth plan, the centerpiece of his legislative agenda for the year.

Democrats said they agree on the concept of a plan to rebuild California's public works, but offered only a sketchy outline of alternatives to the governor's spending priorities. New classrooms, public transit systems and environmental protections should come first, said Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez, D-Los Angeles.

Schwarzenegger's plan emphasizes spending on schools, but also puts on emphasis on rebuilding freeways, levees, ports, prisons and government buildings such as court houses.

"The fact that we need to invest in California's infrastructure — we are still committed to that," said Nunez, flanked by about half the Assembly's 48-member Democratic caucus. "We are also committed to re-prioritizing what our needs are in terms of infrastructure bonding."

Schwarzenegger proposed the building plan in January, intending to put the first of $68 billion in bonds before voters in the June election. Whether the differences can be accommodated in time to place an initiative on that ballot is unclear.

The governor's plan calls for voters to approve a series of bonds through 2014 to provide part of the money needed to rebuild California's public works.

He has said he is open to alternative views and expects to negotiate a compromise with legislative leaders. But he also has said he will resist any move to turn his plan into a one-year bond only.

On Thursday, Nunez said some members of the Democratic caucus favored just such an approach.

Speaking to business leaders Thursday in San Jose, Schwarzenegger promoted the building plan as crucial for improving the state's economy, as he has done in a series of recent public forums.

"Add all of these things up — better roads, better ports, better public safety, better air and water, better schools — and you see why the strategic growth plan is a necessity for California," he said. "It's good for the people, and it's good for business. It will lead to a jobs and construction boom all around the state, with all the benefits that go along with it."

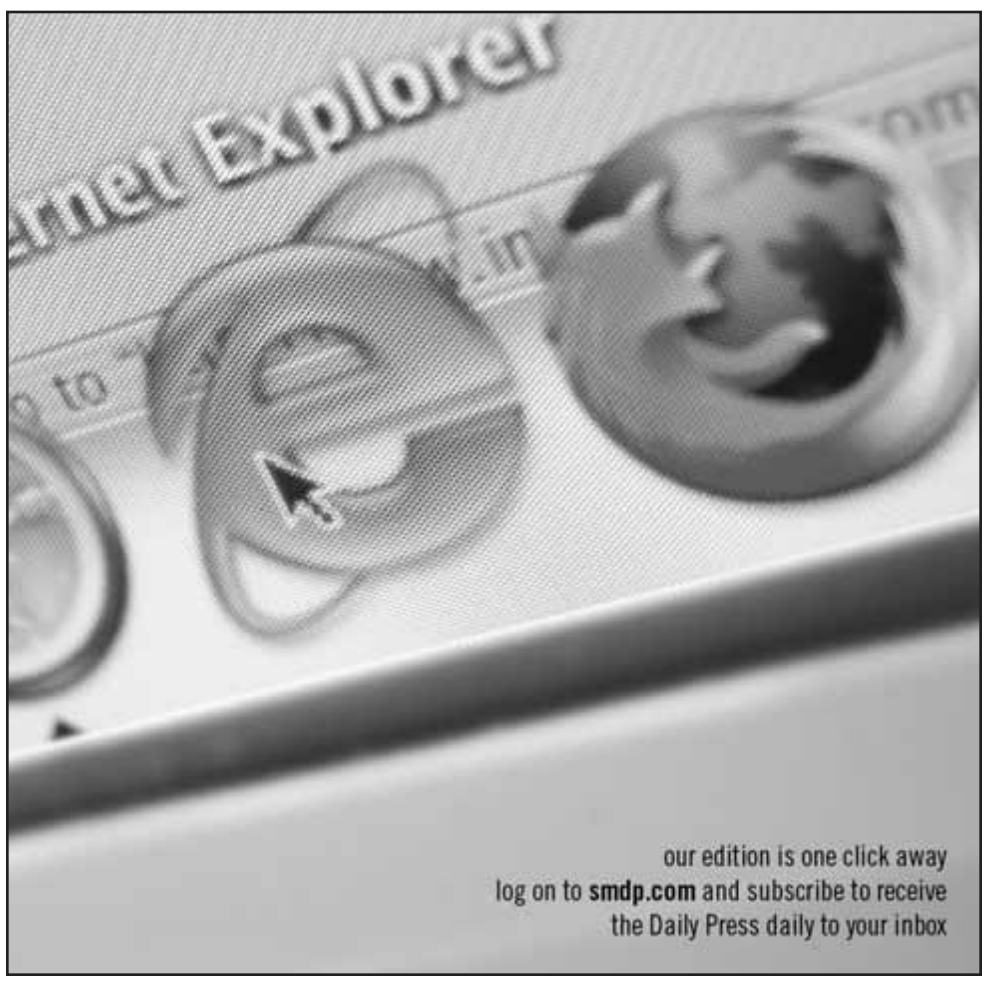
The Assembly Democrats' news conference followed a three-day retreat in Monterey during which the caucus considered not just the governor's bond program but also the state budget and other issues. Their return to Sacramento marks the beginning of serious negotiations over spending and legislative issues.

Democrats said their goal in negotiating with Schwarzenegger over the bond proposal was to get more money for schools, public transportation and parks, but they provided almost no details about how they planned to fund the initiatives.

They said the governor's plan for paying back the $68 billion in borrowing, if approved by voters, put too much of a burden on the state's general fund. Yet they offered no alternative.

They also spoke about a broad initiative to upgrade schools, a 10-year plan to make California among the best in the country. But again, Nunez offered no details.

He said he preferred to discuss details with the governor before making them public.



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STATE

Ivy walls: No stars spotted in usual crawls

BY BETH J. HARPAZ
Associated Press Writer

LOS ANGELES — My kids are New Yorkers, but their hearts are in Hollywood. They love Us Weekly magazine. They clamor to see new movies on opening day. And they know more about Gov. Schwarzenegger than they do about Mayor Bloomberg.

So a recent family trip to Los Angeles turned into a hunt for all things Hollywood. The challenge was to find places that would be meaningful to children who know Drew Barrymore but not Bette Davis.

That's why we didn't go to places like the Hollywood Forever Cemetery to pay our respects to Cecil B. De Mille. Instead, hoping to bump into Lindsay (Lohan) or Owen (Wilson), we window-shopped on Rodeo Drive and Melrose Avenue, bought sandwiches from the trendy and ridiculously crowded Urth Cafe, and people-watched at The Grove, a pedestrian mall.

We didn't see any stars there, but we did conclude that unless you're thin, beautiful, wearing sunglasses and drinking cappuccino while talking on your cell or texting from your Treo, you really don't belong here.

Then we headed to Venice, setting for the recent skateboarding flick, "Lords of Dogtown." In a nod to Ah-nold, we hung out at Muscle Beach. The kids had fun on the playground's climbing ropes and gymnastic rings.

Back in West Hollywood, we brunched at the fabled Ivy restaurant — a high point of our trip. This was my 12-year-old's idea, inspired by photos he'd seen of the glitterati taking their power-meals there. Friends in New York said we'd never get a reservation without knowing someone, but one phone call, with no name-dropping, got me a table for four on a Sunday morning. (Hey, I get nothing but a busy signal at Nobu in Manhattan, but they answer the phone at The Ivy.)

The food was great, the decor — white picket fence, flowers and baskets — charming. And although we were obviously tourists — who else takes pictures of themselves eating pancakes? — I'm sure Julia Roberts is treated no better than we were by the kind and attentive staff. P.S., it was the priciest breakfast I've ever had — $35 a person including tax and tip — but it was worth every penny, even without a glimpse of Julia.

Hollywood Boulevard's Walk of Fame is a must for fans of all ages. The kids were thrilled to find plenty of stars in the sidewalk they recognized, from Britney Spears to the Olsen twins to Jackie Chan. They weren't interested in the historic Grauman's Chinese, Egyptian and El Capitan theaters, but they did perk up at the mention of the Kodak Theatre, home of the Oscars.

We debated taking a bus tour of celebrity homes. Would it be too much Twentieth Century-Fox and not enough 21st century stars? We decided to try Starline's tour, and were not disappointed. Well, OK, full disclosure: The 7-year-old fell asleep. But his big brother was fascinated.

We passed by a hotel featured in "Pretty Woman," and the Comedy Store, where, according to our amiable guide and driver, Rick Gallagher, "Robin Williams and Jay Leno were discovered!" On to the Key Club, "where 50 Cent recently recorded a video!"

Sure, there were places that mean little to the under-15 set — The Roxy, where John Belushi hung out the night of his fatal overdose, and the house where Joe DiMaggio and Marilyn Monroe lived. But there were more recent references too — Tom Cruise's house, Lohan's high-rise apartment in Sierra Towers, and the white-columned mansion used for the exterior shot in "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air," known through reruns to the younger generation.

If you've ever been on a tour like this, you know that half the time you're not really sure which building is actually being referred to as you drive past. But it's fun to glimpse mansions with hedges so high no one could ever hope to peer in a window and streets where $100,000 sports cars are more common than Toyotas.

Finally, what trip to Los Angeles with kids is complete without a theme park or two? Yes, the lines are insane. But if you buy tickets in advance, arrive early, and literally run to the most popular rides the minute the doors open, you can usually get through some of the top attractions without long waits.

We hit Universal Studios Hollywood first. We loved the high-tech shootout in the "Terminator 2: 3D" show, along with the pyrotechnics in "Backdraft," a show that explains the special effects from the firefighting movie. Jurassic Park was our favorite thrill ride, but we also liked Revenge of the Mummy. Van Helsing: Fortress Dracula was freaky; if you're a jumpy sort or have young kids, think twice before entering this haunted house-style attraction.

Riding the Universal studio tour through stage sets and backlots — from the wild West to ancient Greece — was truly entertaining. The broken airplane from the set of "War of the Worlds" was a big hit, and we also passed by the Wisteria Lane set from "Desperate Housewives." But the kids liked the old-time stuff too — a demonstration of the parting of the waters from "The Ten Commandments," the mechanical shark from "Jaws" and the Bates Motel from "Psycho."

Our last stop, Disneyland, was 30 miles from Hollywood in Anaheim, but offered plenty of movie connections. We loved shooting the electronic targets in the Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters ride, and the animatronics in Pirates of the Caribbean were fantastic. Our other top choices were the Indiana Jones Adventure thrill ride and The Haunted Mansion attraction — though the 2003 movie with Eddie Murphy was based on the ride, and not vice versa.

Our favorite ride of all — which had nothing to do with Hollywood — was Soarin' Over California, located at Disney's California Adventure park. The seats rise 40 feet off the floor in a hang-gliding simulation while lush footage of California's landmarks, coast and parks dreamily rush before your eyes. It's surreal and exhilarating.

Despite our best efforts, we didn't spot any celebrities on our trip. But the rides, Hollywood landmarks and people-watching almost made us feel like we had stepped through a screen, and into a movie ourselves.

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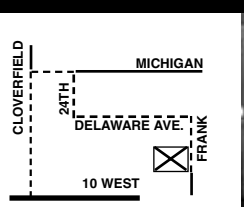

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NATIONAL

Sandia lab researchers are on hunt for a better battery

BY SUE MAJOR HOLMES
Associated Press Writer

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — Sandia National Laboratories is trying to build a better battery for the hybrid vehicles of today and the fuel-cell vehicles of the future.

Researchers are working on a lithium-ion battery, which holds the promise to cost less and perform better than the nickel-metal hydrides batteries hybrids now use, said Dan Doughty, manager of Sandia's advanced power sources research and development department.

Lithium-ion batteries aren't new technology. In the past few years, they've become the power source for many laptop computers because they perform better than previous computer batteries.

But automotive technology is more complex.

Lithium-ion batteries would have to be cheaper than nickel-metal hydride, last as long and weigh less, "which is a very hard problem," said Doughty, who has worked in the power sources group for 13 years. A battery also must be abuse-tolerant — meaning if it fails, it won't cause other problems.

If those issues can be solved, "the manufacturing base would grab this and run," Doughty said.

Sandia receives $1.5 million a year from the Department of Energy's FreedomCAR program for the lithium-ion research.

FreedomCAR is aimed at developing electric-powered vehicles to help free the United States from dependence on foreign oil. Sandia and four other national labs — Argonne, Lawrence Berkeley, Idaho and Brookhaven — are working on different aspects of developing hybrid technology.

The demand for more fuel-efficient vehicles has risen with gasoline prices, adding to the pressure for more hybrid and fuel-cell electric vehicles.

In that respect, "high gas prices are a good thing because it helps people think about their use of the natural resources, and they see the cost more clearly," Doughty said.

Hybrids aren't as clean as fuel-cell vehicles, but they deliver better mileage than comparable gas engines by switching between an electric motor and gasoline engine. The U.S. hybrid market increased by more than 140 percent in the past year — but hybrids also cost about $3,500 more on average.

The lithium-ion battery is widely considered to be the next generation of battery technology, said Jason Mark of Berkeley, Calif., vehicles director with the Union of Concerned Scientists.

Researchers have been improving the lithium-ion battery for a decade. What's needed now is testing and analysis to validate the battery's life and performance in hybrids, as well as its real cost, said Ted J. Miller, who works on advanced battery technology for the Ford Motor Co..

Miller, speaking on behalf of the U.S. Advanced Battery Consortium, which has worked closely with Sandia on a lithium-ion battery, said he expects the technology to be introduced in hybrids before the end of the decade.

Lithium-ion batteries are able to deliver more energy, "but my sense is that one of the real challenges of lithium-ion batteries has been cost," Mark said.

The other is durability.

"The battery has to last 150,000 miles, which is the life of a car. That is no small feat," Mark said. "Durability becomes a cost issue if you have to change your several-thousand-dollar battery twice in the life of the car. That significantly changes the economics of a hybrid vehicle."

Doughty agrees battery life and cost are linked. If a battery is cheap enough, it could be replaced more frequently; if it lasts a long time, a customer might be willing to spend more money for it, he said.

The Advanced Battery Consortium, in published requirements for hybrid batteries, wants them to last a challenging 15 years, Doughty said. Current nickel-metal hydride batteries in a Toyota Prius, by comparison, are warranted for eight years or 100,000 miles.

One problem with lithium-ion batteries has been durability. Sandia's abuse tolerance testing is aimed at seeing how they function outside a normal operating range. And if something fails, researchers want it to fail gracefully — without damaging other systems.

"We haven't solved the problems yet," Doughty said.

Engineers also want systems that have a wide margin of error before failing.

"You won't want them to fail if you're driving just a little too fast, so we take batteries to conditions they're not designed for and see how they fail," Doughty said.

Researchers overheat the batteries, simulate a fuel fire, crush or penetrate batteries and drop them on hard surfaces. They also charge them too much, perhaps to twice the limit, or short-circuit them.

"The idea is to see what the response of it is, to characterize the magnitude of the response, how severe it is" so engineers can figure out how to overcome the problem, Doughty said.

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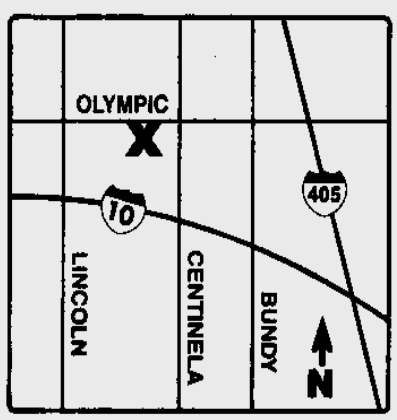

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COMMUNITY BRIEFS

BRIEFS, from page 3

this week.

The rules relate to products containing mercury or heavy metals, including batteries and fluorescent lights, which are considered universal waste in California.

Since 2002, households and small businesses have been exempt from the state's Universal Waste Rule, which applies to certain hazardous wastes generated by a wide variety of people. The exemption was intended to give local agencies more time to develop the infrastructure to collect and properly dispose of these materials, officials said. Under the rule, "universal waste" includes batteries, mercury thermostats, fluorescent lights, cathode ray tube devices (computer monitors, televisions), mercury thermometers, and other products containing mercury or other heavy metals.

"These materials can endanger public health and harm the environment when improperly disposed," said DTSC Director Maureen Gorsen. "Our goal is to encourage Californians to recycle or properly dispose of fluorescent lamps, batteries, thermostats and electronic devices."

Mercury is a known neurotoxin and can be released into the environment through the improper disposal of mercury-containing products. Exposure to high levels of mercury can permanently damage the brain, kidneys and developing fetuses. Short-term exposure may damage lungs, cause nausea, vomiting, increases in blood pressure, skin rash and eye irritation.

Santa Monica residents and businesses — the latter by appointment and for a small fee — have a permanent drop-off location available to them at the city's household hazardous waste center, 2500 Michigan Ave. Center hours are Wednesday through Friday, 7 a.m. - 1 p.m. and Saturday, 7 a.m. - 3 p.m., except holidays). Contact the city of Santa Monica's environmental programs division at (310) 458-2213, or visit www.smepd.org <http://www.smepd.org/> for more information.

A complete list of universal waste products, and information about disposal and recycling options, is available at http://www.dtsc.ca.gov/HazardousWaste/UniversalWaste/index.cfm

Fatal police chase came to abrupt end at Venice building

SUSPECT SHOT, from page 1

Monica, according to SMPD Lt. Frank Fabrega.

Smith was pronounced dead at the scene, which ended in the 400 block of Santa Clara Avenue in Venice after he led police on a short pursuit in the stolen Dodge Shadow. Smith eventually smashed the car into the side of a building.

The incident began at 4:39 a.m. at the corner of 10th Street and Michigan Avenue, where Smith originally stole the vehicle. The victim, who was not injured, was driving behind a white van when it slowed and eventually stopped, Fabrega said. The victim told police he thought the driver of the van was having mechanical problems so he stopped to help him. That's when Smith pointed a shotgun at the victim and stole his car.

SMPD officers began searching surrounding areas and 15 minutes later found Smith driving the stolen vehicle in Venice. While other SMPD officers were responding to the scene, two officers in one patrol car approached Smith, who stopped and exited the vehicle armed with a shotgun. He fired at the officers and got back in the car. After he crashed the car, Smith exited the car armed, and officers opened fire on the suspect. He then got back into the vehicle, Fabrega said.

After a brief delay and police ordering him to surrender, Smith pointed the shotgun in the direction of officers, who then opened fire on him again. The gun was dropped and no movement was seen from Smith inside the car, Fabrega said.

The van Smith was driving before he stole the Dodge Shadow was reported stolen on Feb. 5 from a carjacking that occurred in Venice by a suspect described as a black man armed with a shotgun, Fabrega said.

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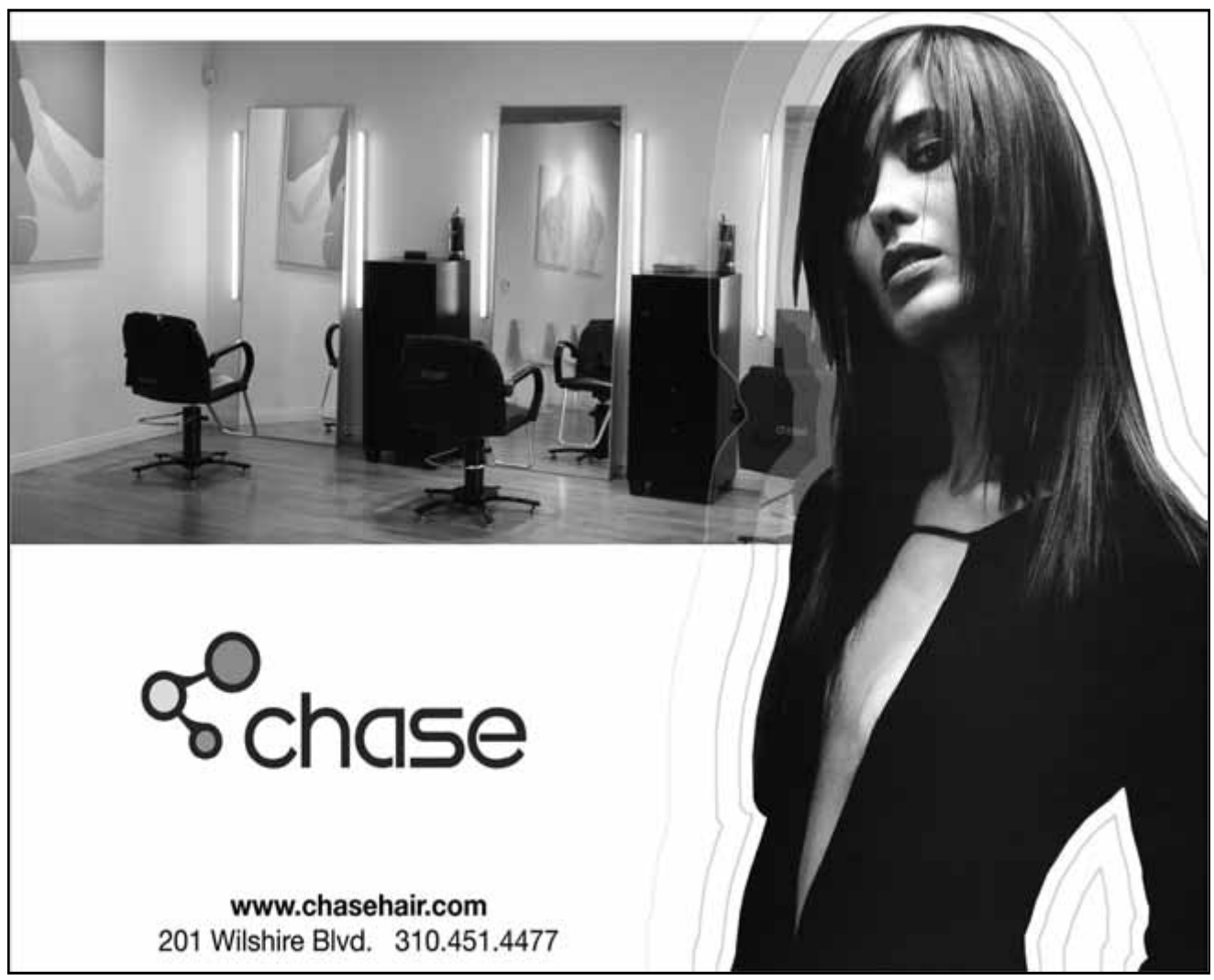

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LOCAL

Peacemakers look to be settling disputes by summer

BOARDWALK, from page 1

is organizing the team.

The Los Angeles City Council last week unanimously approved a new Venice Beach ordinance to regulate its world-famous boardwalk, and community activists familiar with the issues say the new rules are a first step to creating a Venice in which all who visit can accept and respect.

The new ordinance is intended to address a variety of public concerns aimed to protect the fabled street performers and defend free speech, as well as eliminating commercial activity along the west side of the boardwalk, according to LA City Councilman Bill Rosendahl, whose 11th District jurisdiction includes Venice.

Rosendahl's proposal — which was born from three public meetings drawing hundreds of locals — declares an officially recognized "Free Speech and Expression Zone" from Navy Street to 17th Street; allows performers, entertainers and free expressionists to sell their own original and constitutionally-protected merchandise; prohibits all other commercial activity; and begins to crack down on excessive noise.

Officials said that the greatest effect the new ordinance will have is to eliminate commercial activity on the west side of the boardwalk, thereby freeing up more space for artists and expressionists. In recent years, boardwalk users have been fighting for limited space to exercise their right to free speech, sell their art and hawk their wares.

Rosendahl's efforts are a response to complaints about a revised Venice boardwalk ordinance that went into effect in October of 2004, which attempted to address frustration among boardwalk users and resident complaints over noise. Several boardwalk artists and vendors spoke out against it, arguing that measure took an unneeded step to regulate how they conduct themselves before millions of visitors who come annually to regard the legendary spectacle of the boardwalk.

Last July, the situation reached a breaking point when the American Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit against the city of Los Angeles, alleging that the boardwalk ordinance violates the First and 14th Amendments of the U.S. Constitution, because it is too broad and subjective to enforce.

The lawsuit is still pending, said Carol Sobel, an attorney handling the case.

"We still have some definite differences (with the city of Los Angeles), so we're waiting to see what the final ordinance looks like before we sign off on anything," she said.

The complaint contends that Venice founder Abbot Kinney aimed to create a cultural and artistic renaissance by instilling a tradition of free speech in the community he began. This "unique history of celebrating the freedom of speech" came into question by the enforcement of the new law and "threaten(ed) to change the character of Venice Beach forever," the lawsuit states.

Plaintiffs represented in the case include a homeless advocacy group called "Food Not Bombs" and two individual permit holders, Woody Mulligan and Robert "Jingles" Newman.

Fabian Lewkowicz/Daily Press

Flags and streamers decorate the Venice sky atop the hostel at the end of Windward Circle.

Newman is a political activist who has been protesting the mistreatment of animals and police brutality on the boardwalk since 1974, oftentimes wearing a pig mask to "take on the character of the animals on whose behalf he advocates," the lawsuit states.

Newman was prosecuted for soliciting donations on the boardwalk after a young girl gave him a few dollars for some flyers he had given her earlier in the day, the lawsuit states.

The misdemeanor was reduced to an infraction and subsequently dropped, but Newman "fear(ed) engaging in free speech activities" after receiving the violation and "being threatened with imprisonment and a large fine," the lawsuit states.

Newman told the Daily Press this week that he is generally supportive of the new ordinance. He compares the boardwalk to a "piece of clay that is constantly being molded."

Newman said the new ordinance has components which will facilitate that molding process and make for a better boardwalk.

"It's a work in progress," Newman said.

Rosendahl's proposal directs the city's Department of Recreation and Parks to collaborate with the Grass Roots Venice Neighborhood Council to create a working group to monitor the new ordinance and how it may be improved. The council was formed with the intent of representing resident interests.

The working group will explore whether the lottery-based system of issuing permits for boardwalk space may be modified or abolished.

Those who do exhibit but don't apply for permits, take part in the lottery, or violate other rules, are considered to be in violation of the ordinance. Each of the warnings may be appealed, but the third citation means the permit is revoked and the person can no longer legally qualify for a boardwalk space — for life.

The lottery system has been cumbersome, ineffective and even inappropriate in its attempt to regulate freedom, according to expressionists. Before it was put into place, however, residents trying to sleep in on a Saturday or Sunday morning were waking up to the sound of bickering among boardwalk users. Police were being called out, and their resources drained, in order to meddle in disputes which might have been avoided if a system were in place which more easily settled them.

The new ordinance will also look at developing ways to further restrict amplified noise.

Newman said he feels the boardwalk's "darkest days are behind."

"I'm a lot more optimistic than I was a year ago," he said.

ARE PEACEMAKERS FOR REAL?

Newman attributes brighter days for the boardwalk to Rosendahl and Friske, who has developed the peacemakers idea and is currently seeking ways to fund and operate the proposed team.

Friske said the purpose of the peacemakers is to provide what he believes should be self-regulation on the boardwalk.

"Their main mission is simple — to assist, inform and mediate," Friske said. "It's not about control. It's about coming from a place in your heart where you want it to work.

"The peacemakers' power will come because the community will want them to work."

The peacemakers could be successful because boardwalk participants will likely prefer their methods over punitive enforcement, Friske believes. At the same time, law enforcement officials will be freed up to respond to other grievances.

Friske is presenting the peacemakers' plan to business groups in Venice. He hopes to have a group organized and trained in time for the summer tourist season.

It's hoped that the peacemakers will become a boardwalk mainstay because, if they are able to prove themselves in coming years, they may present an opportunity to abolish the lottery system. By eliminating the commercial activity, the peacemakers' job may also be easier, since more space will be freed up for artists and expressionists for which the boardwalk was originally intended.

Friske said the peacemakers, once established, might achieve the order and stability sought on the boardwalk that the lottery system is meant to provide.

Until then, the lottery system will remain the law of the land, he said.

Robert Haskin, director of the Venice Beach Recreation Center, which oversees the lottery system, said the peacemakers may prove to be an effective way to regulate the boardwalk, if they are able to win the community trust.

"I believe if it works it would be a great thing," Haskin said. "It won't be successful overnight, but over the long run it's the best idea for the boardwalk."

His cupola runneth over

Fabian Lewkowicz/Daily Press

Fernando Alegria, 20, recently paints a cupola on the Santa Monica Pier.

A century of optimism

OPTIMISTS, from page 1

we are actively working on," said Krista Grueninger, communications manager for Optimists International, established in 1919 as the parent organization to optimists clubs in the U.S., Canada, France, the Caribbean and Asia. "We are trying to build clubs at the college level and at middle schools and high schools so that we attract adolescents early and keep them interested in the organization and the work we do."

There are many reasons why the ranks of community service organizations are shrinking, optimists contend. Among them, companies rarely sponsor employees who join, something that was commonplace 20 years ago.

Also, those in their 20s and 30s may not be as financially settled or secure as in decades past, and therefore, cannot afford to join a service organization like the optimists.

"Many young people don't live in the city and are in such a rush in the evenings to get back home that it's hard for them to volunteer their time," Lady said. "But it's a great organization and one that is very rewarding when you see the faces of the kids you've helped."

Santa Monica's optimist club donates much of the money it raises to the Youth Home, the Boys and Girls Club and the Salvation Army.

Optimists clubs were created in the early 1900s to address societal ills that arose from industrialization and subsequent urbanization, taking their name to express a desire for a positive outlook.

According to the Optimist Creed, members are supposed to "be strong and let nothing disturb (their) peace of mind" and "forget the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future," while always "looking at the sunny side of everything and make (their) optimism come true."

Membership in the clubs dropped in the 1930s during the Great Depression, and peaked in the '60s as clubs expanded their reach by sponsoring anti-pornography campaigns, drug and alcohol awareness, and sex education. The organization opened its arms to delinquent girls and boys, and clubs started popping up overseas with greater regularity.

The organization's focus now is on expanding the network, while maintaining those clubs already in existence.

Santa Monica club member Gaby Schkud said it would be a shame for the local branch, which has about 25 members, to shrink to almost nothing.

"It has allowed me to make a difference not only in my community, but in the lives of so many young people," she said.

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NATIONAL

Bush budget rubs environmentalists wrong way

BY JOHN HEILPRIN
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Grants to state and local governments for land and water conservation would be cut 40 percent, and money for the Environmental Protection Agency's network of libraries for scientists would be slashed severely under President Bush's proposed budget.

By contrast, Bush next year would spend $322 million for "cooperative conservation" — up from $312 million the Congress approved last year — to encourage more private landowners to protect endangered species, conserve wildlife habitats and do other nature work traditionally done by government.

Other proposed increases are $50 million more for cleaner-burning diesel engines and $5 million more for drinking water improvements.

Cuts and proposals to sell some of the government's vast land holdings have upset environmentalists.

The administration plans to raise $250 million over five years by selling 125,000 acres of the Bureau of Land Management's 261 million acres.

The lands are typically part of a checkerboard pattern of small parcels surrounded by suburban or urban areas, Interior officials say, and have been identified as holding little natural, historic, cultural or energy value.

The administration anticipates selling them for $2,000 an acre. The Forest Service, which is part of the Agriculture Department, plans to sell 170,000-200,000 acres of nationial forest in 41 states, according to The Wilderness Society.

The budget calls for raising a total of more than $1 billion over five years by selling off public lands of the two agencies that are deemed to have little scenic, recreational or mineral value.

Forest Service and BLM officials say the sales, including isolated tracts that can be hard to manage, will allow them to operate more efficiently and generate new revenue for operations. But most of the proceeds would go to the federal treasury.

Early in his presidency, Bush called for restoring the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund to the full $900 million authorized by Congress. Last year, it was approved at $142 million. For 2007, he wants just $85 million in grants for creating and preserving nonfederal parks, forest land and wildlife refuges, a 40 percent cut. The budget also would cut $89 million from the National Park Service's nearly $2.6 billion budget.

"This is the most troubling budget we've seen from this White House," said Heather Taylor, deputy legislative director for Natural Resources Defense Council.

The proposal sent to Congress this week would trim EPA's budget by nearly 5 percent, down to $7.2 billion, and the Interior Department's budget by 2.4 percent, to $9.1 billion.s

Sen. James Jeffords, I-Vt., said it shows the environment isn't a Bush administration priority. "We cannot allow this dangerous trend to continue," said Jeffords, a senior member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

Interior Secretary Gale Norton and EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson said their budgets represent, within the context of reducing the federal deficit, a responsible allocation of resources that will still lead to environmental improvements.

One potential hole in the Interior budget is $312 million for an Office of Surface Mining program to reclaim abandoned mines. The money comes from coal mining fees set to expire in June. The Bush administration is asking Congress to reauthorize the fees.

"Nobody wants to see the program come to a halt," Norton said.

Another proposal affects EPA's electronic catalog that keeps track of tens of thousands of agency documents and research studies, according to EPA internal memos. The agency would cut four-fifths of its library budget — from $2.5 million to $500,000. It pays for a network of dozens of libraries and reading rooms nationally.

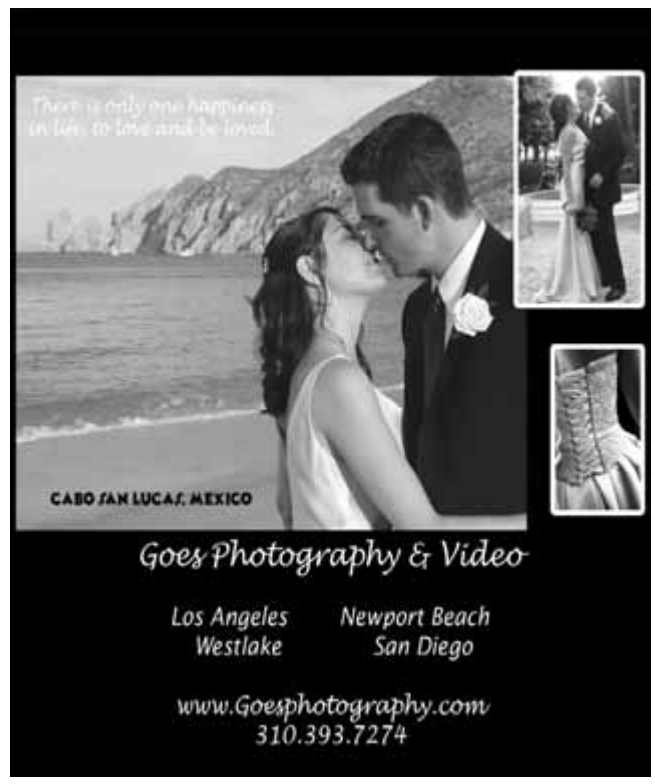
"How are EPA scientists supposed to engage in cutting edge research when they cannot find what the agency has already done?" said Jeff Ruch, executive director of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, which obtained the EPA memos.

EPA spokeswoman Eryn Witcher said materials will still be available.

"EPA is working to modernize our antiquated system by streamlining our physical collections and making them available online to provide more information to a wider group of people, including scientists," she said.

Low-interest loans to states for treating wastewater, cutting other water pollution and managing watersheds would be cut by 22 percent, to $688 million.

Bush has requested $184 million for EPA's homeland security programs — including monitoring water supplies against terrorists and decontaminating buildings after chemical or biological attacks — and more than $100 million for its energy-related programs.



Arizona police put the pinch on seven fraudulent document rings

BY JACQUES BILLEAUD
Associated Press Writer

PHOENIX — Seven fraudulent document rings were shut down with the arrests of 16 people for alleged involvement in making or selling the type of fake IDs and other records used by illegal immigrants, authorities said.

The operations sold a package of driver's licenses, Social Security cards and "green cards" and could produce the so-called "thr 3/4packs" within 40 minutes of receiving an order, said Leesa Berens Morrison, leader of a task force of police focusing one fraudulent identification.

Authorities said they didn't know how many fraudulent records were produced by the rings and the makeup of the operations' clientele, though the documents they produced are typically those sought by illegal immigrants.

Illegal immigrants could use the package, which costs $140 to $170, to establish bank accounts and other necessities for life in the United States, she said.

"All it takes is a high-end printer and a computer and somebody with the know-it-all to put it all together," said Todd Lawson, an attorney for the attorney general's office.

Charges against those who were arrested Thursday will include forgery and trafficking in the identity of another person, Lawson said.

"We are now beginning to impact this trade," said Gov. Janet Napolitano, who created the fake identification task force last year.

Arizona, the busiest illegal entry point along the country's southern border, serves as a hub for smugglers who transport illegal workers across the country.

Public pressure is mounting for state politicians who face re-election races this year to confront Arizona's border problems, even though immigration has long been considered the sole province of the federal government.

NATIONAL

Abramoff scandal hits top Democrat

BY JOHN SOLOMON AND SHARON THEIMER
Associated Press Writers

WASHINGTON — Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid portrays convicted lobbyist Jack Abramoff's activities as involving only Republicans. But Abramoff's billing records and congressional correspondence tell a different story.

They show Abramoff's lobbying team billed for nearly two dozen contacts with Reid's office in a single year to mostly discuss Democratic legislation that would have set the minimum hourly wage for the Northern Mariana Islands, an Abramoff client, initially almost $3 lower than other U.S. states and territories.

Reid, D-Nev., also wrote at least four letters to the Bush administration helpful to Indian tribes Abramoff represented, often collecting donations from Abramoff-related sources around the same time.

And in the midst of the contacts, Abramoff's firm hired one of Reid's top legislative aides to lobby for the tribal and Marianas clients. The aide then helped throw a fundraiser for Reid at Abramoff's firm.

The activities — detailed in billing records and correspondence obtained by The Associated Press — are far more extensive than previously disclosed. They occurred over three years as Reid collected nearly $68,000 in donations from Abramoff's firm, lobbying partners and clients.

Ethics rules require senators to avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest in collecting contributions around the times they take official acts benefiting donors.

Reid's office acknowledged Thursday having "routine contacts" with Abramoff's lobbying partners and intervening on some government matters — such as blocking some tribal casinos — in ways Abramoff's clients might have deemed helpful. But it said none of his actions were affected by donations or done for Abramoff.

"All the actions that Senator Reid took were consistent with his long-held beliefs, such as not letting tribal casinos expand beyond reservations, and were taken to defend the interests of Nevada constituents," spokesman Jim Manley said.

Abramoff has pleaded guilty in a fraud and bribery case and is now helping prosecutors investigate lawmakers, congressional aides and administration officials his team used to lobby.

Abramoff spokesman Andrew Blum declined to comment on the Reid contacts.

Reid has assailed Republicans' ties to Abramoff while refusing to return any of his own donations. He argues there's no need to return the money.

"Senator Reid never met Jack Abramoff and never has taken contributions from him, and efforts to drag him into this are going to fail," Manley said. "Abramoff is a convicted felon and no one has suggested the other partners we might have dealt with have done anything impermissible."

While Abramoff never directly donated to Reid, the lobbyist did instruct one tribe, the Coushattas, to send $5,000 to Reid's tax-exempt political group, the Searchlight Leadership Fund, in 2002. About the same time, Reid sent a letter to the Interior Department helpful to the tribe, records show.

Abramoff sent a list to the tribe entitled "Coushatta Requests" recommending donations to campaigns or groups for 50 lawmakers he claimed were helpful to the tribe. Alongside Reid's name, Abramoff wrote, "5,000 (Searchlight Leadership Fund) Senate Majority Whip."

Following a pattern seen with Abramoff and Republicans, Abramoff's Democratic team members often delivered donations to Reid close to key events.

Reid and his Senate counsel Jim Ryan met with Abramoff deputy Ronald Platt on June 5, 2001, "to discuss timing on minimum wage bill" that affected the Marianas, according to a bill that Greenberg Traurig, Abramoff's firm, sent the Marianas.

Three weeks before the meeting, Greenberg Traurig's political action committee donated $1,000 to Reid's Senate re-election committee. Three weeks after the meeting, Platt himself donated $1,000 to Reid.

Manley said Reid's official calendar doesn't list a meeting on June 5, 2001, with Platt, but he also said he couldn't say for sure the contact didn't occur. Manley confirmed Platt had regular contacts with Reid's office, calling them part of the "routine checking in" by lobbyists who work Capitol Hill.

As for the timing of donations, Manley said: "There is no connection. This is just a typical part of lawful fundraising."

The U.S. territorial islands in the Pacific Ocean were one of Abramoff's highest-paying clients and were trying to keep their textile industry exempt from most U.S. laws on immigration, labor and pay, including the minimum wage. Many Democrats have long accused the islands of running garment sweatshops.

The islands in 2001 had their own minimum wage of $3.05 an hour, and were exempt from the U.S. minimum of $5.15.

Republicans were intent on protecting the Marianas' exemption. Democrats, led by Sen. Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts and Rep. George Miller of California, wanted the Marianas to be covered by the U.S. minimum and crafted a compromise.

In February 2001, Kennedy introduced a bill that would have raised the U.S. hourly minimum to $6.65 and would have covered the Marianas. The legislation, which eventually failed, would have given the islands an initial break by setting the minimum at just $3.55 — nearly $3 lower than any other territory or state — and then gradually increasing it.

Within a month, Platt began billing for routine contacts and meetings with Reid's staff, starting with a March 26, 2001, contact with Reid chief of staff Susan McCue to "discuss timing and status of minimum wage legislation," billing records say.

In all, Platt and a fellow lobbyist reported 21 contacts in 2001 with Reid's office, mostly with McCue and Ryan.

One of the Marianas contacts, listed for May 30, 2001, was with Edward Ayoob, Reid's legislative counsel. Within a year, Ayoob had left Reid's office to work for Abramoff's firm, registering to lobby for the islands as well as several tribes. Manley confirmed Ayoob had subsequent lobbying contacts with Reid's office.

Manley cast doubt on some of the contacts recorded in the billing records, saying McCue was out of Washington for a couple of the dates. But he acknowledged the contacts could have occurred by cell phone.

In January 2002, McCue took a free trip, valued at $7,000, to Malaysia with several other congressional aides. The trip, cleared by Senate ethics officials, was underwritten by the U.S. Malaysia Exchange Association, a group trying to foster better relations between the United States and Malaysia.

The trips were part of a broader lobbying strategy by Malaysia, which consulted with Abramoff and paid $300,000 to a company connected to him, according to documents released by Senate investigators. The arrangements included a trip by then-House Majority Leader Tom DeLay and his wife to Malaysia in October 2001.

While Abramoff worked behind the scenes, the Alexander Strategy Group run by two former DeLay aides, Ed Buckham and Tony Rudy, publicly registered to lobby for the U.S. Malaysia Exchange Association.

Rudy, who was cited in Abramoff's court case, had worked temporarily for Abramoff before joining Buckham at Alexander Strategy, and the three men were friendly. In January 2002, Alexander Strategy arranged two congressional trips to Malaysia underwritten by the association.

One trip took a delegation of Republican congressmen. A Democratic consultant hired by Alexander Strategy, former Clinton White House aide Joel Johnson, invited McCue and went on the second trip with congressional staffers.

Johnson said he invited McCue on behalf of Alexander Strategy and went on the trip with her but said he knew of no connections to Abramoff. "My interest was in getting Democrats to travel to the country and to learn more about Malaysia," Johnson said.

Reid intervened on other matters.

On March 5, 2002, he sent a letter to the Interior Department pressing the agency to reject a proposed casino by the Jena band of Choctaw Indians in Louisiana. Fellow Nevada Sen. John Ensign, a Republican, also signed.

The Jena's proposed casino would have rivaled one already in operation in Louisiana run by the Coushattas, and Abramoff was lobbying to block the Jena. The day after Reid's letter, the Coushattas wrote a $5,000 check to Reid's Searchlight group at Abramoff's suggestion.

Reid and Ensign recently wrote the Senate Ethics Committee to say their letter had nothing to do with Abramoff or the donation and instead reflected their interest in protecting Las Vegas' gambling establishments.

"As senators for the state with the largest nontribal gaming industry in the nation, we have long opposed the growth of off-reservation tribal gaming throughout the United States," Ensign and Reid wrote. Reid authored the law legalizing casinos on reservations, and has long argued it does not allow tribal gambling off reservations.

On Nov. 8, 2002, the Nevada Democrat signed a letter with California Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein urging Interior Secretary Gale Norton to reject a proposal by the Cuyapaipe Band of Mission Indians to convert land for a health clinic into a casino in southern California.

The casino would have competed with the Palm Springs gambling establishment run by the Agua Caliente, one of Abramoff's tribes.

Two weeks later, Reid went to the Senate floor to oppose fellow Democratic Sen. Debbie Stabenow's effort to win congressional approval for a Michigan casino for the Bay Mills Indians, which would have rivaled one already operating by the Saginaw Chippewa represented by Abramoff.

"The legislation is fundamentally flawed," Reid argued, successfully leading the opposition to Stabenow's proposal.

The next month, Reid joined six other Democratic senators in asking President Bush in mid-December 2002 to spend an additional $30 million for Indian school construction. Several Abramoff tribes, including the Saginaw and the Mississippi Choctaw, were seeking federal money for school building.

Six weeks after that letter, three Abramoff partners — including Platt and Ayoob — donated a total of $4,000 to Reid's Senate re-election campaign. Later in 2003, the Agua Caliente contributed $13,500 to Reid's political groups while the Saginaw chipped in $9,000.

Reid sent a fourth letter on April 30, 2003, joining Ensign a second time to urge Interior to reject the Jena casino.

A couple of months later, Abramoff's firm threw a fundraiser for Reid at its Washington office that netted the Nevada senator several more donations from Greenberg Traurig lobbyists and their spouses. Ayoob was instrumental in staging the event, Reid's office said.

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Santa Monica Daily Press

NATIONAL

Crowded slopes force resorts to cope

BY MARK LARABEE
Associated Press Writer

MOUNT HOOD MEADOWS, Ore. — Ski patrol manager Mel Toney steps easily into the role of traffic cop as she patrols one of Mount Hood Meadows' new "comfort zones," where slow and safe is the rule.

"Slow down, please!" she yells at a skier whizzing by in a gray jacket highlighted with Day-Glo yellow accents.

Toney, who has policed the slopes at Meadows for nine years, is helping the resort increase its safety education and enforcement efforts this year — a banner snow year drawing thousands more skiers and snowboarders to Mount Hood.

Ski areas across the nation are re-emphasizing safety messages this year as the ranks of skiers and snowboarders steadily grow. Despite a poor ski season in the Northwest, last year U.S. ski resorts posted their fourth-busiest year, with nearly 57 million visits to the slopes.

Statistics show the sheer number of injuries are not a huge problem for ski areas. Recorded injuries are half of what they were 30 years ago, said Tim White, director of education for the National Ski Areas Association, a Lakewood, Colo., industry group. The drop is mostly thanks to better equipment and mountain safety programs such as the one at Meadows, White said.

That doesn't mean that serious injuries and deaths don't happen. They do. That's why maintaining and improving safety is a priority.

Dave Riley, Meadows' general manager, said keeping the slopes safe for families and beginners also makes good business sense.

"Kids are our future, and parents need to have a level of comfort coming up to the mountain that they'll be safe," he said. "That's how we came up with the name 'comfort zone.' These are sanctuaries that have an extra (enforcement) presence from our mountain safety department."

The goal, Toney said, is to increase skier and snowboarder awareness that safety is an individual responsibility. In turn, ski areas hope to reduce injuries and make for a better mountain experience for everyone.

While snowboarders suffer injuries at twice the rate of skiers, White said, most injuries are not the result of collisions but because skiers and boarders crash on their own.

Fatalities appear to be a result of age and gender more than any other factors, according to recent research by Jasper Shealy, who tracks ski injuries at the Rochester Institute of Technology in New York. His studies, heavily cited at ski symposiums, found that 85 percent of the people who die on the slopes are male, and 70 percent are in their late teens to late 30s. And most of those who die are usually above-average skiers and snowboarders going fast on the edge of intermediate trails.

Most injuries at Meadows, Toney said, are related to snow conditions and occur when skiers or boarders catch an edge, twist an ankle or knee, or crash on their own. Between opening day Nov. 11 and Dec. 26, 2005, Riley said Meadows logged 121,000 visits. During that time 354 injuries were reported, only 22 of which were caused by collisions.

In conjunction with National Safety Awareness Week recently, Meadows handed out the NSAA's seven-step skier responsibility code to lift-ticket buyers, which, among other things, calls on skiers and snowboarders to stay in control and be aware of others. The code is posted around the lodge as well.

Meadows also has posted signs warning customers that they could have their pass revoked for reckless behavior. "Space not Speed" signs are meant to make customers aware of the people around them.

Meadows' comfort zones are at the base of the Hood River Express and Easy Rider chairlifts, where bright yellow signs attract attention. The signs are flanked by Meadows employees who answer questions and shout warnings to anyone moving too fast.

On weekends when the ski area is busier, the Mount Hood Ski Patrol has about 20 people working the resort in addition to eight to 10 Meadows employees in the safety areas, Toney said.

"The signs help, but if there is a presence there, they work even better," she said. "We always want to do better."

Tom Bissell, director of resort operations at Meadows, said the signs and employees are effective ways to get people to slow down and think about others. They're especially important at intersections between runs, where expert snowboarders merge onto a run packed with beginning and intermediate skiers and boarders.

"This is what we like over here," Bissell said, pointing to a woman skiing down a gentle slope with two little children. "Mom's not going to bring the kids skiing if she's nervous. She should have a reasonable expectation of a controlled environment."

Scott and Marketa Rogers of Portland were skiing at Meadows with their three children: twin daughters, Lilly and Milenka, 7, and son, Nicholas, 5. The couple said their kids wear helmets, know how to safely snowplow and have been taught to watch for others. Still, just before lunch, Lilly was hit from behind by a snowboarder. She wasn't hurt.

"I usually run interference for them," Scott Rogers said. "By the time I got there, he was helping her up."

They said the new comfort zones and the emphasis on safety are good ideas and make for a more pleasant day.

"I'm grateful for them," Marketa Rogers said. "Otherwise it's a free-for-all."

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INTERNATIONAL

West Coast's first LNG terminal finds home in Mexico

BY ELLIOT SPAGAT
AP Business Writer

ENSENADA, Mexico — In late 2003, Sempra Energy's bid to build the first liquefied natural gas terminal in western North America was in deep trouble. Plans to import gas from Bolivia sparked a popular uprising that killed dozens of people and toppled the government there.

Today, Sempra is leading the race. It turned to Indonesia for the gas, and is building a $1-billion plant on Mexico's pristine coastline, just 50 miles south of San Diego. The terminal, to be completed in early 2008, will be a key fuel source for California homes and businesses for decades to come.

The decision to build in Mexico is paying off big for Sempra, which owns Southern California's two major gas utilities. Rivals who want to build LNG terminals on California's coast are being stymied by environmental and NIMBY — "not in my back yard" — groups. For Sempra, the choice was easy.

"The Mexican government had their arms open, saying, 'Please, anybody who wants to build an LNG plant, come here and apply,"' said Donald Felsinger, chairman and chief executive officer.

Sempra isn't the only company using a cross-border strategy in the energy industry's rush to LNG.

Terminals are being built in Canada to fuel the eastern United States — one by Anadarko Petroleum Corp. in Point Tupper, Nova Scotia and one by Repsol YPF in Saint John, New Brunswick. Gas from those plants will be sent on a pipeline that connects to the U.S. grid in Calais, Maine.

LNG is supercooled liquefied gas that is shipped from far-flung countries — Iran, Qatar, Russia and Indonesia are major suppliers — to coastline terminals, where it is heated, vaporized and fed into a pipeline. Sempra and other companies are convinced that LNG is key to keeping a lid on gas prices in the United States as domestic supplies dwindle.

The rub: Many coastal communities don't want massive fuel tankers hogging their shores. Regulators approved five new LNG terminals in Texas and three in Louisiana, but companies have struggled to find a home outside the Gulf of Mexico, particularly in California and New England.

That's not to say that all Mexicans welcome LNG either. Lobster fishermen and the owner of a neighboring resort say Sempra's hulking plant threatens business. Surfers say a phenomenal surfing spot was destroyed after the San Diego-based company began construction in March.

Environmentalists have waged a spirited — and so far unsuccessful — campaign to derail Sempra, regularly blocking traffic at the plant entrance and bringing activists from around the world to rally local opposition. They sued the California Public Utilities Commission in state court last year to force the regulator to reconsider a ruling that cleared the way for Sempra to pipe gas from the plant to the U.S. grid near Tecate, Calif.

Mexican opponents have scored big victories against other companies that planned LNG terminals in nearby cities that, by comparison, made Sempra's location look downright remote. ConocoPhillips Co. dropped plans for a terminal in Rosarito, a spring-break hotspot just 15 miles south of San Diego. Marathon Oil Corp. was forced out in 2004 when municipal authorities seized its beachfront property in the crowded border city of Tijuana.

"They are using Mexico as a dumping ground, as a back door to the United States," said Jose Luis Sanchez, 47, an environmental activist in Tijuana.

Sempra says the plant is good for Mexico, which will split the gas with the United States. "They wanted to make sure that their economy is not stranded, and they've acted," said Darcel Hulse, president of Sempra's LNG unit.

The drone of bulldozers and cement trucks fills the air as some of the plant's 820 construction workers labor on a grated hillside of agave and desert shrub one recent morning. Cranes hover above the concrete foundation of two giant cylindrical tanks that will store the liquid gas.

The plant sits on a 395-acre lot on the northern edge of Ensenada, a port city of 250,000 people. When finished, it will process up to 1 billion cubic feet of gas daily — equal to about one-sixth of California's consumption — and there's enough room to more than double capacity to 2.5 billion cubic feet a day.

A tiny fishing village of about a dozen makeshift trailers lies next to the plant. Men fish for lobster, crab and sea cucumber in a stretch of ocean also populated by seals, dolphins and whales. Renato Gonzalez, 32, ekes out a living finding starfish, which are sold to tourists in Tijuana.

"What can we do?" Gonzalez said as he waited for the sunlight to bake dozens of starfish on a wire-mesh table. "It's a very powerful company. We don't have a choice."

Mario Loera, who has fished for lobster for 13 years, said he will move in 2008, when the plant begins operations. "I still have two years to go."

Sempra, which was formed in 1998 in the merger of Southern California Gas Co. and San Diego Gas & Electric Co., has transformed from a stodgy utility to a diversified company that builds pipelines and power plants.

In 2000, the company turned suspicious of forecasts by the U.S. government and industry consultants that domestic natural gas would remain cheap and plentiful.

A company researcher pored over microfiche showing drilling patterns going back to the early 1900s. Employees scoured public records in Texas, New Mexico and Oklahoma. Their conclusion: the United States cannot produce enough gas to feed itself and will turn increasingly to imports, just as it did with oil.

Sempra's dour outlook became the premise for a $2.9 billion investment in LNG. Aside from Mexico, it began building a $950 million terminal near Lake Charles, La., last year and plans to start on a $700 million plant next year in Port Arthur, Texas.

Sempra was sent scrambling in late 2003 when plans collapsed to import the gas to Mexico from Bolivia on a pipeline to Chile's north coast. The project rekindled old animosities from a 19th century war that left Bolivia landlocked, and violent protests toppled the government.

Things quickly turned in Sempra's favor. It signed a 20-year agreement with BP PLC to import liquefied gas from Indonesia, and defrayed costs by agreeing to rent half the Mexican plant to Royal Dutch Shell.

Environmentalists say their fight to block the Sempra is far from over, but they face a formidable foe.

In 2002, environmentalists sued the U.S. Department of Energy in U.S. federal court to prevent Sempra from sending power to the United States from its new electricity plant in the Mexican border city of Mexicali. Critics said Sempra was exploiting Mexico's looser regulations. Sempra said shutting the power lines would raise prices for U.S. consumers. Sempra won.

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PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

This just in: Vargas pregnant

By The Associated Press

NEW YORK — ABC's "World News Tonight," scrambling to fill the gap left by its injured anchor, Bob Woodruff, is facing further instability: Elizabeth Vargas, Woodruff's co-anchor, is pregnant.

Vargas and her husband, singer-songwriter Marc Cohn, are expecting their second child in late summer, they announced Friday. The couple have a son, Zachary, 3, and Cohn has two children — Max, 14, and Emily, 11 — from a previous marriage.

Vargas, who with John Stossel also co-anchors the ABC newsmagazine "20/20," will continue to anchor both programs through late summer.

"I told Elizabeth that during such a difficult time for all of us, it's good to get such wonderful, life-affirming news," ABC News President David Westin said in a statement.

Woodruff is being treated at Bethesda Medical Center in Maryland for injuries he sustained in an Iraqi roadside bombing on Jan. 29.

Vargas, 43, and Woodruff, 44, debuted as "World News Tonight" co-anchors Jan. 3.

They succeeded longtime anchor Peter Jennings, who had been off the air since April, when he announced during his broadcast that he was battling lung cancer. He died in August.

In Jennings' absence, both Vargas and Woodruff served as a substitute anchor of "World News Tonight," as did "Good Morning America" host Charles Gibson.

After Woodruff's injury, both Gibson and his "GMA" co-host Diane Sawyer have filled in, and will continue to do so "for the next few weeks," said ABC News spokeswoman Cathie Levine. "When we have more information about Bob's recovery, we'll put a plan in place to take us forward."

Referring to any maternity leave Vargas might take, Levine added, "We'll factor that in, as well."

AUSTIN, Texas — "American Dreamz," a satire about American identity starring Mandy Moore, Hugh Grant and Dennis Quaid, is among 50 feature films making their world debut at this year's South by Southwest film festival.

The festival, which runs March 10-18, will show 120 feature films. Other premieres include "95 Miles to Go," which follows "Everybody Loves Raymond" star Ray Romano on a standup comedy tour, and "Even Money," a tale about three gambling addicts starring Kim Basinger, Danny DeVito, Kelsey Grammer and Ray Liotta.

Organizers said they received a record number of roughly 2,800 submissions this year.

"We considered many more films this year," said Matt Dentler, South by Southwest producer. "Our job was harder than ever before, but it also means we saw a better array of films than ever before."

NEW YORK — Britney Spears has taken responsibility — well, some of it — for driving with her baby son, Sean Preston, sitting in her lap.

"I made a mistake and so it is what it is, I guess," Spears tells "Access Hollywood" in an interview that was to air Thursday.

Several photos published Tuesday showed Spears driving her sport utility vehicle in Malibu, Calif., with her 4-month-old son perched on her lap rather than strapped into a car seat in the back seat.

The 24-year-old pop star said she did it because of a "horrifying, frightful encounter with the paparazzi."

In response, X17, the agency that snapped the pictures, said they were snapped "in a very peaceful context, in which photographers exhibited no aggressive behavior."

"Being put in the situation that I was in, it was kind of bad with the paparazzi," Spears tells "Access Hollywood." "Last week, my mom and I went out and they were on us really bad, so you instinctively do what you need to do."

The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department has said it will not pursue any charges. Sean Preston, who was born in September, is Spears' first child. She is married to Kevin Federline, a former backup dancer.

NEW YORK — Barry Manilow has landed on the top of the charts with a just-released album for the first time in 29 years.

Manilow's "The Greatest Songs of the Fifties," debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 chart, followed by Mary J. Blige's "The Breakthrough" and Andrea Bocelli's "Amore."

The album, 13 standards such as "Are You Lonesome Tonight?" and "Unchained Melody," has sold more than 156,000 copies in the United States since it arrived Jan. 31.

His previous debut chart-topper was the 1977 concert recording, "Live." His last album, "Scores: Songs From Copacabana and Harmony," had a weak debut in 2004, peaking at No. 47.

Manilow, 62, said he was inspired to sing the 1950s pop classics because he feels they deserve more attention.

"The reason I connected with it is when I looked at the list of songs that came out of the '50s, it seemed to me that they had been neglected," he told Associated Press Television News.

"Nobody seems to have done `Unchained Melody' or `It's Not for Me to Say' or `Beyond the Sea,' any of these songs that were wonderfully written that came out of the '50s. So that turned me on. I dove in."

NEW YORK — Ali MacGraw will make her Broadway debut in "Festen," the London hit that will also star Larry Bryggman, Michael Hayden and Julianna Margulies.

The play, David Eldridge's stage adaptation of the acclaimed 1998 Danish film, is the story of a family in turmoil, with Bryggman playing the patriarch, MacGraw as his wife and Hayden and Margulies as their children.

"Festen," originally seen in London in 2004, will open April 9 at the Music Box Theatre. Preview performances begin March 23.

Santa Monica Daily Press
MOVIEGUIDE
SHOWTIMES FOR WEEKEND EDITION, FEBRUARY 11-12, 2006

Broadway Loews Cineplex
1441 3rd Street
(310) 458-1506

The Matador
11:45pm 2:15pm 5pm 7:45pm 10pm
Something New
1pm 3:15pm 5:30pm 8pm 10:15pm
Transamerica
11:30am 1:30pm 4:15pm 7pm 9:45pm
Walk the Line
11am 1:45pm 4:30pm 7:30pm 10:30pm

Mann's Criterion Theatres
1313 3rd Street
(310) 395-1599

Big Momma's House
2 11:10am 1:40pm 4:10pm 6:50pm 9:20pm
Hoodwinked
11 am 1:10pm 3:20pm
The Pink Panther
11:30am 2pm 4:30pm 5:30pm 7pm 7:40pm 9:30pm 10:10pm 12am
Munich
11:40am 3:10pm 6:40pm 10:20pm
When a Stranger Calls
12:40pm 3pm 5:20pm 7:30pm 9:50pm
Firewall
11:20am 1:50pm 4:40pm 7:20pm 10pm 12:30am

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Annapolis
11:15am 10:20pm
Capote
1:30pm 7:20pm
The Chronicles of Narnia
12:30pm 4pm 7:05pm
Curious George
11am 12:50pm 3pm 5:10p, 7:30pm 9:40pm 11:45pm
Nanny McPhee
11:25am 2pm 4:30pm 7:15pm 9:55pm
The New World
1:10pm 4:10pm 10:10pm
Syriana
1:45pm 4:40pm 7:40pm 10:40pm
Underworld: Evolution
11:50am 2:20pm 4:50pm 7:25pm 10pm

Nu-Wilshire Theatre
1314 Wilshire Blvd
(310) 394-8099

Brokeback Mountain
12:15pm 3:45pm 7pm 8pm 10pm
Imagine Me & You
12:10pm 2:30pm 5pm

Laemmle Monica Theatre
1332 2nd Street
(310) 394-9741

Good Night, and Good Luck
1:15pm 3:30pm 5:45pm 8pm 10:15pm
Match Point
1:10pm 4:05pm 7pm 9:55pm
The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada
1:40pm 4:25pm 7:10pm 10:05pm
Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story
1:10pm 3:25pm 5:40pm 7:55pm 10:10pm

Questions or comments? Email calendar@smdp.com

MORE TODAY IN HISTORY

In 1812, Massachusetts Gov. Elbridge Gerry signed a redistricting law favoring his party, giving rise to the term "gerrymandering."

In 1847, American inventor Thomas Alva Edison was born in Milan, Ohio.

In 1858, a French girl, Bernadette Soubirous, claimed for the first time to have seen a vision of the Virgin Mary near Lourdes.

In 1861, President-elect Lincoln departed Springfield, Ill., for Washington.

In 1929, the Lateran Treaty was signed, with Italy recognizing the independence and sovereignty of Vatican City.

In 1937, a sit-down strike against General Motors ended, with the company agreeing to recognize the United Automobile Workers Union.

In 1972, McGraw-Hill Publishing Co. and Life magazine canceled plans to publish what had turned out to be a fake autobiography of reclusive billionaire Howard Hughes.

In 1979, followers of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini seized power in Iran.

In 1986, Soviet dissident Natan Sharansky was released by the Soviet Union after nine years of captivity as part of an East-West prisoner exchange.

In 1990, South African black activist Nelson Mandela was freed after 27 years in captivity.

Ten years ago: A day after losing to an IBM computer dubbed "Deep Blue," world chess champion Garry Kasparov rebounded to defeat the machine and even their six-game series in Philadelphia at one victory apiece.

COMICS

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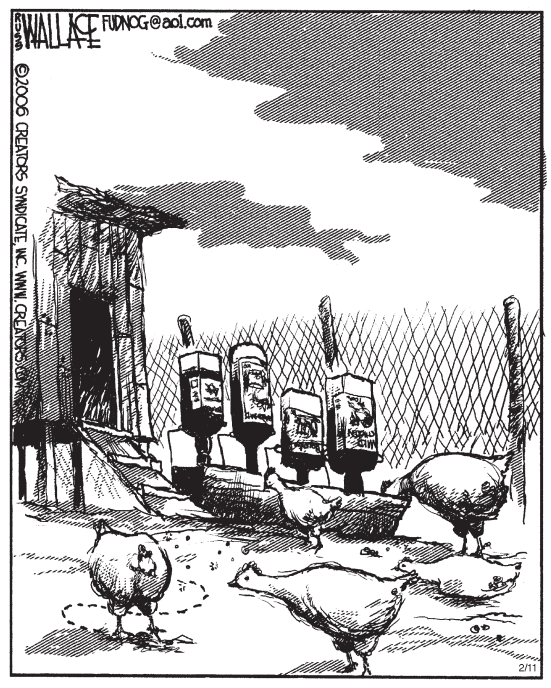
Natural Selection®

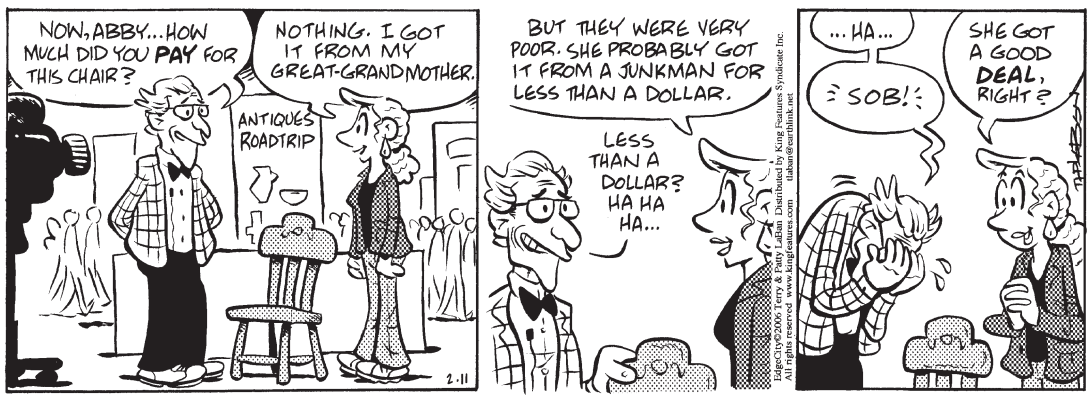
By Russ Wallace



Bourbon Chicken Farm

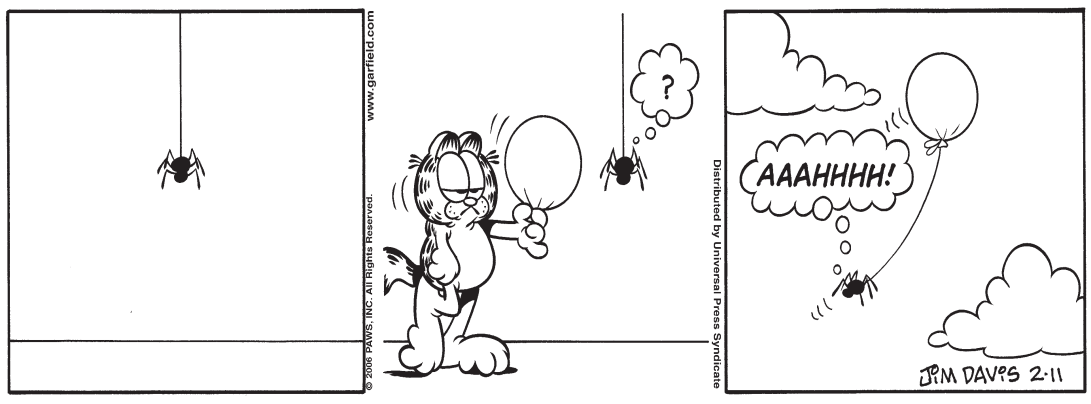
edge City

by TERRY & PATTY LABAN



Garfield®

By Jim Davis



Speed Bump®

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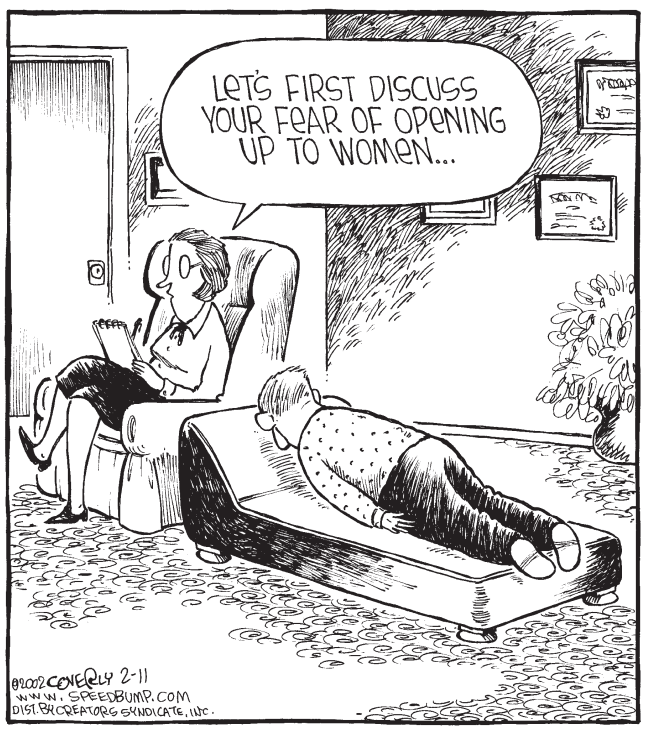

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Strike
5 Head in the bar
9 Book-store section
10 Albert and Victoria
12 Potpourri bit
13 Crooked
14 Corners
16 Previously called
17 Long swimmer
18 Break
20 Engine type
22 Tag info
23 Houston player
25 Fret
28 Tourist's car
32 Apparition
34 Hostile
35 Cunning
36 Come clean about
38 Bow application
40 Martin's auto-making partner
41 Pivoted
42 Times Square signs
43 Relaxing places
44 Genealogy chart

DOWN

1 Play opener
2 Miniature
3 Distantly
4 Exercise system
5 Whisky holder
6 Trough bit
7 Like
8 Brawls
9 Alacrity
11 Artery opener
15 "Shakespeare in Love" co-star
19 Bus. sch. course
21 Cut
24 Leftover piece
25 Prepares for a fight
26 Flings
27 Relishes
29 Go quietly
30 Play opener
31 French city
33 Salad servers
37 Manipulative sort
39 — word

S	T	A	R	■	■	C	H	A	D	■
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T	A	S	T	E	■	A	R	S	O	N
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L	A	P	■	L	A	Y	O	V	E	R
A	V	O	C	A	D	O	■	A	C	E
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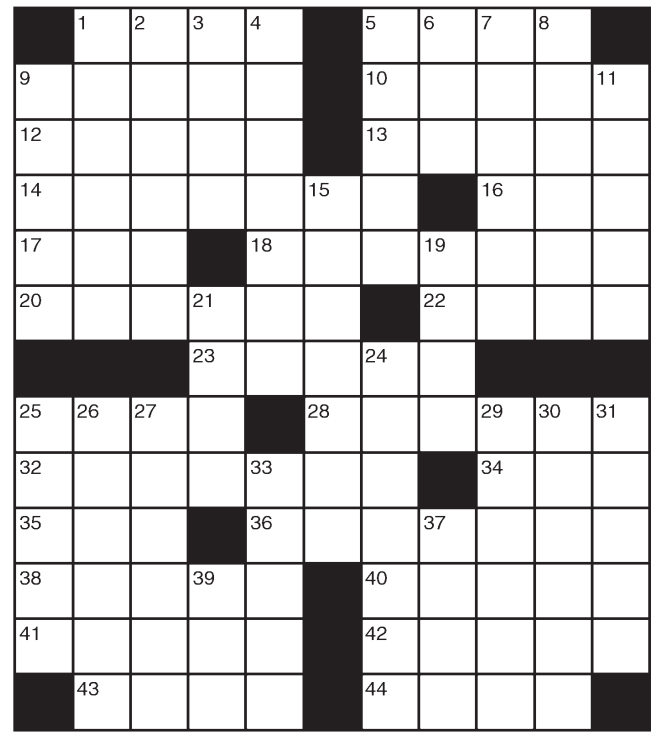

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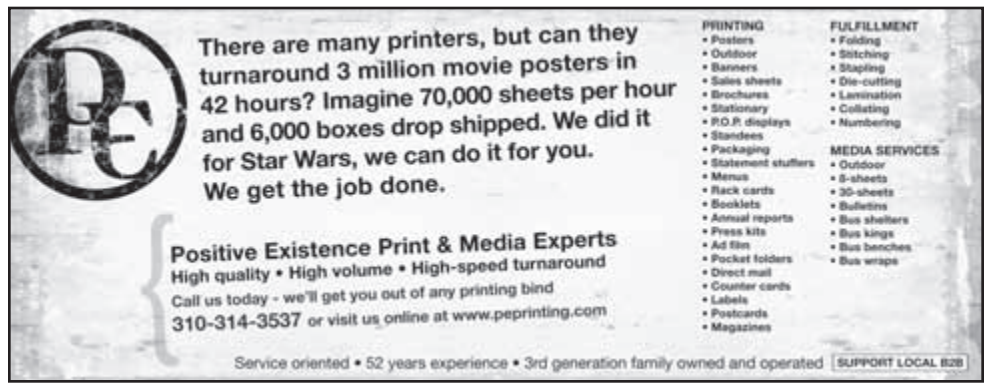

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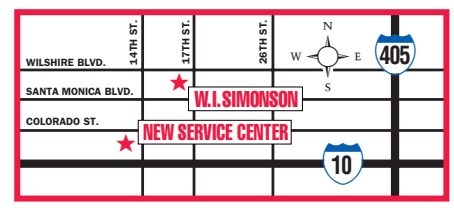

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