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Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press

Is Jacob Levy's playhouse a two-story structure? Sunset Park residents David and Beth Levy are suing the city, arguing a neighbor's complaint ultimately placed political pressure on city staff to order the structure illegal. Jacob Levy, 6, continues to enjoy his playhouse while the two sides have been embroiled in a 17-month-long legal battle.

Insider pressure alleged in City Hall

Lawsuit forces issue of whether city staff cracked under political pressure

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON
Daily Press Staff Writer

(Editor's note: This is the first story in a multi-part series that focuses on a 6-year-old's playhouse caught in the middle of a legal battle with the city of Santa Monica).

A former City Hall employee says he quit because Santa Monica's top brass are bending to inside political pressure in deciding which zoning violations to prosecute.

Mike Gruett said he left his job because he was ordered to designate a 6-year-old's backyard playhouse illegal even though he determined it wasn't. Gruett, a code compliance supervisor, also said he was forced to lay off another playhouse that clearly was illegal.

Gruett's claim marked the latest chapter in a 17-month-old lawsuit filed by David and Beth Levy against the city. The couple, who live in a Santa Monica east side neighborhood, claim that former mayor and current city councilman Ken Genser advocated that city staff reverse the ruling that the playhouse was legal because the Levy's backyard neighbor complained directly to him.

Gruett's allegations were unveiled at a press conference Friday held by Levys' attorney Chris Harding.

It's unclear why Gruett waited one year since his departure to bring allegations that the city's zoning division can crack under political pressure.

In this case, he claims that his supervisor, Planning Director Suzanne Frick, had him issue a notice of violation to the Levy family even though he had earlier found the playhouse satisfied city zoning laws.

"In the course of my career, I have issued well over 1,000 notices of violation," he said in court papers. "I believe that the (one involving the Levy playhouse) is the only one I have ever issued where I believe that no violation existed. I am not proud of this document but was forced to sign it by direct order of my supervisor."

The true reason Frick decided to reverse Gruett's original ruling is up to a judge, who'll next hear arguments in the case March 25. Gruett wasn't at the Friday press conference announcing his claims.

Genser said Sunday that Gruett's claims aren't true. The councilman says he was merely passing along a complaint from Tunde Garai, the neighbor who claimed city staff wasn't responding to her. Genser said he asked by e-mail that city staff follow up on her complaints.

"Whatever staff did they did it on their own," Genser said, adding Garai's complaint was lost for weeks in City Hall. "I was just passing on the complaint and saying, 'hey get off the dime and respond to this.'"

See PLAYHOUSE, page 3

Pico neighborhood up in arms over violence

Police defend beefed up presence in troubled area

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON
Daily Press Staff Writer

Three shootings in three months on Santa Monica's east side has residents concerned that gang activity may be on the rise.

All of the incidents — none of which were fatal — occurred within the Pico neighborhood, which covers about eight square blocks just north of the Santa Monica Freeway to Pico Boulevard, and east to the city limits.

"To have that many shootings and not draw any attention from the police and the city council is not acceptable," said Don Gray, who lives on 17th Street and Delaware. "It highlights a bigger failure than they want to admit. I mean, what is acceptable? Why is it different for this neighborhood?"

The neighborhood has been embroiled for years in a turf war largely between two gangs — the Graveyard Crypts and the Santa Monica 17th Street gang. And the tension appears to be not only racially motivated between the two groups — one black, the other Latino — but also drug related. Drug dealing on street corners along Delaware Avenue has a been a problem for years, say residents.

Santa Monica Police Chief James T. Butts Jr. said the Pico neighborhood has been a challenge for years, but the department and the city has beefed up patrolling there, which has led to a decrease in crime.

"Gang activity has fallen 83 percent in the city," he said, adding in 1991, the SMPD had 157 gang-related crimes reported and in 2000, there were 14.

However, some residents aren't convinced that those statistics represent an accurate picture.

"If they want to treat that stuff as anecdotal evidence then fine, but to hide behind trending statistics is wrong," said Gray. "I think they could give a s--- that people are killing each other here."

In November, a 24-year-old male was shot in the chest in a drive-by shooting while sitting in his car. The suspect remains at large.

On Jan. 24, the neighborhood was in "lock down" mode for hours while authorities from five jurisdictions, along with SWAT teams, searched the area for two suspects after one was stopped for a traffic violation, but fled from police. A shoot-out between police, the driver of the car and another suspect ensued throughout the neighborhood before both were caught.

A week ago, a teenager was shot in the head in a drive-by shooting while he was walking down a sidewalk near Edison Elementary School on Virginia Avenue. He remains in stable condition and his shooter remains at large.

See CRIME, page 3

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JACQUELINE BIGAR'S STARS

The stars show the kind of day you'll have:
★★★★★-Dynamic ★★★★-Positive ★★★-Average ★★-So-so ★-Difficult

ARIES (March 21-April 19)
★★★★ Indulge yourself on the way to work. Buy doughnuts or get a favorite coffee. Cohorts delight in your mood; hopefully you bought them doughnuts, too. Your instincts lead you to make the right decisions in the next month. Tonight: Your treat, and you love it!

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
★★★★★ Unusual vitality marks your actions. Others delight in your choices that revolve around what they want and what you want. You're in a win-win situation no matter what. Focus, and you'll hit the bull's-eye. Tonight: Romp away.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20)
★★★★ Read between the lines, listening to someone's words. You understand a boss very clearly. The good news lies in your instinctive reaction to this person. You know what you are doing. Be happy to let someone else take credit. Tonight: Work as late as you need to.

CANCER (June 21-July 22)
★★★★★ Bring friends together, but still be conscious of getting certain errands and projects done. A partner means well but could flake out on you, though you might not be uptight about it. Learn to read between the lines with someone important in your life. Tonight: Celebrate. Any excuse works.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)
★★★★ Take charge, as only the Lion can. Others delight in your sense of control and support you in whatever decisions you make. Deal with a key associate directly, rather than letting him or her hear news via the grapevine. Maintain that personal quality. Tonight: Talks over dinner.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)
★★★★ Take in a different perspective. Others run the show in the next few weeks. Learn to adjust and work better with others. Confusion surrounds what seemed like a wonderful plan. Get feedback and make a needed judgment. Tonight: Answer your e-mail.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)
★★★★★ Deal with others individually to most effectively move through an issue. Let someone see just how important he or she is to your life directions. Creativity and risks take you into a riptide of problems. Step away before you get pulled under. Tonight: Togetherness works.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)
★★★★ Others seek you out. Plans get confused before the day gets old. Speak to someone before problems occur. Tune in to your diplomatic ways. What you consider a flirtation, someone else reads as much more. Use care with this person's feelings. Tonight: Someone reaches out for you.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)
★★★★ Head into the office. Make getting your work done your No. 1 priority. If you listen to a conversation with half an ear, you will be confused. Make it a point to do everything 100 percent right now. Do nothing halfway. Focus on domestic matters this month. Tonight: Squeeze in some exercise.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)
★★★★★ Your imagination can be one of your greatest resources. Dig into possibilities. Realize that anything can happen at any time. Communication leads you down a new path with someone. Love can happen in a split second. Tonight: Play the night away.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)
★★★ Your family remains your highest priority right now. In fact, you might opt to call in to work in order to stay close to home. Are you considering a home-based business? Realize your limits, especially financially, and avoid biting off more than you can chew. Tonight: Do something you love at home.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)
★★★★★ Speak your mind, and others will, too. Though you could be confused by what someone said, you grab the opportunity to clarify. The sun moves into your sign today, adding to your magnetism and energy. Tonight: Return calls, then decide.

WEATHER

Today ...	Partly Cloudy	High—61°F	Low—47°F
Tomorrow ...	Partly Cloudy	High—65°F	Low—50°F
Wednesday ...	Partly Cloudy	High—76°F	Low—52°F

QUOTE of the DAY

"There is no sweeter sound than the crumbling of one's fellow man."

— Groucho Marx *(1890-1977)*

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LOCAL

‘Whistle blower’ quits over ethical issues

PLAYHOUSE, from page 1

The Levy case presents a host of unanswered questions in a lawsuit which is, by all appearances, being used to manipulate public opinion of City Hall.

“Whatever staff did they did it on their own.”

— KEN GENSER
Santa Monica city councilman

City law prevents elected officials from ordering any official staff action. It requires that all inquiries go through the city manager, currently Susan McCarthy. The law is meant to protect city employees from undue pressure by elected officials.

This political storm has brewed over the smallest of questions — whether the Levy’s playhouse is a two-story structure because it is elevated on posts.

Gruett, who had worked with David Levy for months while the playhouse was being built, said it is a one-story building which required no building permit. He determined because the playhouse is elevated above the ground by wooden posts and the space under it isn’t enclosed, there is no bottom floor.

But the city decided the space below the elevated floor is a basement after Garai’s complaint was passed on to Frick and other planning department officials. The ruling turned the structure into a two-story building and sparked the threat of criminal prosecution.

“... Applying this to the Levy playhouse was absurd and I recall my jaw practically dropping when I heard planning professionals state this very strained zoning ordinance interpretation,” Gruett said in court papers.

After months and thousands of dollars in modifications to appease the city and Garai, the Levys say they were told the $11,000 playhouse was illegal. To avoid charges, they would have had to tear it down.

The Levy family said Garai turned a cold shoulder to them after repeatedly cooperating in their plans to build the playhouse for their son, Jacob.

When David Levy chose to sue the city, he turned the case into the latest political storm surrounding City Hall. He chose Chris Harding, a land use lawyer who’s made something of a practice out of suing the city, to handle the case.

“I had to protect myself and my family,” he said. “It was my only course of action.”

Levy said that until Garai complained, he thought he was doing everything according to the law.

“I realized when they reopened the case I knew something else was going on,” he said. “I wasn’t being dealt with in an open and honest way. We followed the rules but some people from the city went back on their word. But now I am pleased. Finally someone in City Hall stood up and told the truth.”

Gruett is characterized as a classic whistle blower by Harding.

Gruett said his decision to quit his two-year stint with the city came after another episode in which he was deeply troubled by an order from higher-ups. While the Levy affair was brewing, Gruett sent a notice of violation to a homeowner north of Montana Avenue whose playhouse was too close to the lot line, according to court papers.

But Gruett says his notice was intercepted in City Hall’s mailroom by Frick, who told him that no enforcement was to be taken on any playhouse other than the Levy’s while the city decided whether playhouse enforcement was costing too much to be worth it, according to court papers.

“... Perhaps of most direct concern to me professionally in attempting to build a zoning enforcement program for Santa Monica, I believed and still believe that the decision to move forward with enforcement on the Levy playhouse (based on at best a dubious interpretation of the zoning ordinance) while forcing my staff to retract a notice of violation relating to a plainly illegal playhouse in the city represented an egregious case of ‘selective enforcement,’” Gruett said in court papers. “In the end, I decided I could not tolerate working under those circumstances and resigned.”

City’s efforts to curb crime is working, officials say

CRIME, from page 1

“This kind of thing happens in South Central and East LA all the time, and nobody ever writes about it,” said one Latino man who lives in Los Angeles but hangs out at Virginia Avenue Park. “But here one kid gets hit, and it’s a big deal.”

Parents of children who attend Edison Elementary School, which is situated in the middle of the Pico neighborhood between Kansas and Virginia Avenues and Cloverfield Boulevard and 27th Street, were shocked to learn last week that a shooting occurred just feet from where their children play.

“I’m not really surprised to hear it, but I’m really surprised to find out about it,” said one Edison parent who didn’t want her name used for fear of retaliation from gangs. “Safety is always a concern for me.

“I always make sure I’m here to pick up my kids after school. I don’t like to leave them to walk home. This part of the neighborhood isn’t safe. There are gangs here. You can see them walking around.”

Edison Elementary School PTA President Carolina Williams-Kaback thought gang-related crime had been on the decline until now.

“It’s always very peaceful here,” she said. “Well, it’s the Pico neighborhood and there are some gangs, but as far as I know we haven’t had any incidents for a long time.”

Despite neighbors’ claims that only two police officers are on patrol in the area, Butts said there are nearly a half dozen who are assigned to the beat.

“That is the most single heavily patrolled area in the city,” he said. “That’s a lot of people for an eight block area.”

Along with beefed up patrol, the SMPD has delivered on its “community policing” efforts in the Pico neighborhood by placing a police station at Virginia Avenue Park. The Police Activities League on Pico Boulevard was started in the neighborhood to offer programs for area youth.

The city and the SMPD’s attack on crime starts with providing social services and offering mentoring, supervision and education opportunities to youth.

“We are having remarkable success in the community on stemming violence here,” Butts said. “And we feel the support we’ve given to the Pico neighborhood is appreciated.”

Butts points out that reason the Jan. 23 shoot-out even happened was because the police were there. Police stopped a suspicious car because officers were in patrolling the neighborhood.

“I understand that when it’s in your neighborhood any shooting is one too many,” Butts said. “But we feel like we’ve been there for them.”



Andrew H. Fixmer/Daily Press

A parent attempts to pick up her child at Edison Elementary School, but its perimeters are locked up by fences and chains.

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STATE

Lottery tickets cover small portion of education budget

By The Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — To minimize the pain of buying lottery ticket duds, people often console each other, saying at least the lost money goes to a good cause: public schools.

Despite advertisements that once hailed the lottery as a major solution to California's education funding woes, however, lottery revenues cover less than 2 percent of the state's education budget.

The lottery funneled nearly $1 billion to schools last year. That translates to about $144 per student from the lottery, but only 1.8 percent of the state K-12 education budget.

When the lottery started in the mid-1980s, advertisements billed it as vehicle through which to aid poorly funded schools. Early ads proclaimed, "You win and the schools win too." Mike Kirst, a professor of education at Stanford University, said it was a sneaky marketing campaign.

"The public was bamboozled by the ads into thinking this was a major solution," he told the San Jose Mercury News. "They thought that we had solved the school finance problem."

Kirst said extremely tight education budgets in the 1980s were a public concern. The lottery appeared to be a panacea in the public's mind.

In its 15-year history, the state lottery has raised $13 billion for California schools and colleges, though it never has funded more than 3.2 percent of the state K-12 education budget. Lottery spokeswoman Norma Minas said that's not a problem.

"The lottery provides very important supplemental funding for schools, but it's not a cure-all," she said. "$1 billion certainly buys a lot of books and supplies for students in California."

Lottery advertisements now promote people winning a fortune, rather than the benefits to schools.

University of California is lead plaintiff in Enron lawsuit

BY KRISTEN HAYS
Associated Press Writer

HOUSTON — The University of California Regents will lead the charge for big-time investors and individual shareholders collectively suing current and former Enron Corp. officials for more than $1 billion gained in stock sales before the company imploded last year.

U.S. District Judge Melinda Harmon designated the university late Friday as the head decision-maker in a massive securities-fraud lawsuit against current and former executives and directors of the company.

"We take up this responsibility with the deepest sense of obligation not only to the UC family of employees, retirees and students, but to the millions of Americans who invested in good faith with Enron," said James E. Holst, general counsel for the university.

Milberg Weiss Bershad Hynes & Lerach LLP, the law firm representing the university and Amalgamated Bank, stands to collect the most in attorneys' fees for taking on the lion's share of work in the case as well.

The firm could generate fees reaching hundreds of millions of dollars if an Enron judgment comes close to last year's record $3.2 billion settlement that Cendant and its accounting firm made with stockholders. That case stemmed from a 1998 scandal involving the then-Connecticut company that became the largest financial fraud case ever brought by the Securities and Exchange Commission.

"Millions of Americans invested in Enron because of the confidence they placed in the business practices of the company and the public information provided by its senior executives and accountants," said Milberg Weiss partner William Lerach of San Diego, who has spoken for the regents and Amalgamated in hearings before Harmon.

"On behalf of the University of California as lead plaintiff and working in concert with all the plaintiffs, we look forward to vigorously pursuing the shareholders' case," he said.

The fees provide a big incentive for law firms competing to be lead counsel representing lead plaintiffs in large class-action lawsuits, said Henry T.C. Hu, a corporate law professor at the University of Texas School of Law. The lead plaintiff doesn't get a bigger slice of the judgment pie. But the university will have more power to plan strategy and direct the case, Hu said.

"From a monetary standpoint there's nothing in it for the lead plaintiff," Hu said. "You don't get any more money than your prorated share. But that law firm will be putting in a lot of time, and it could be very attractive financially."

The original class-action fraud case was filed in Houston on behalf of Amalgamated and several investment funds days after Enron filed for bankruptcy on Dec. 2.

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Bush opens trip with discussions on Japanese economy

BY RON FOURNIER
AP White House Correspondent

TOKYO — President Bush, concerned about Japan's recession-wracked economy, opened a three-nation Asian tour Sunday urging embattled Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi to follow through on long-promised economic reforms.

Seeking a delicate balance, the U.S. president was publicly embracing Koizumi and his agenda while privately prodding the prime minister to take the painful steps toward reversing a decade-long economic slump, aides said. Bush hopes his support will tame Koizumi's critics.

"I believe my friend will be able to lead the economy out of its doldrums," Bush told reporters before arriving in Tokyo. "I firmly believe the Japanese economy needs significant reforms and restructuring."

Key to stability in Asia, Japan has solidly supported the U.S. campaign against terrorism.

After a seven-hour flight from Alaska, the president and first lady Laura Bush stepped off Air Force One and into a cold drizzle late Sunday afternoon. He had no public events until Monday.

Downtown, police kept Bush protesters and supporters at bay.

Bush began his first full day in Tokyo with a visit to the Meiji Shrine and a display of horseback archery on the shrine's tree-lined grounds. The shrine, where ruling emperors were once worshipped as divine, was destroyed in World War II by U.S. bombings and rebuilt in 1958.

The president walked hand-in-hand with first lady Laura Bush through the main gate, built from 1,700-year-old cyprus trees from Taiwan. They were escorted by a priest in a flowing white robe. After a few minutes inside, Bush and the first lady emerged to wave at a small crowd nearby.



Shizuo Kambayashi/Associated Press

Left-wing students in helmets and wearing signs calling U.S. President Bush the terrorist are surrounded by Japanese riot police as they march through a street in Tokyo on Sunday in their protest against Bush's three-day visit to Japan. Bush arrived later in the day to begin his six-day Asia tour that will take him to Japan, South Korea and China.

Koizumi, who was Bush's guest at the Camp David presidential retreat in June, was returning the favor by honoring Bush with a formal dinner and reception at his residence. Their business meeting were being held at the Iikura House, a government conference center.

Japan's fortunes are critical to the U.S. economy, which is showing signs of an upturn.

"You can't get the economy going and the region on the right track without Japan," said former Rep. Lee Hamilton, D-Ind., who directs the Woodrow Wilson International Center.

The president's seven-day trip also includes stops in South Korea and China, where the war against terrorism will take center stage. Global warming is another issue as Bush brings word of his volunteer program for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

He rejected an international treaty named after the Japanese city Kyoto.

Japan is mired in its third recession in a decade, with unemployment at a postwar high of 5.6 percent. Banks are saddled with billions of dollars in bad loans and deflation is wiping out the value of property they hold as collateral.

Koizumi rode into office last year on a wave of popularity after campaigning against the entrenched alliances of Japan's political and business elite.

He promised to clean up the bad bank debts and encourage competition in protected areas to revive the economy without resorting to pork-barrel public works spending. He warned that such changes would not come without sacrifice, such as higher unemployment.

But he has appeared to backtrack in recent months as unemployment climbed and conservatives demanded increased government spending to spark the economy.

Koizumi's popularity, though still high, took at blow last month when he fired Makiko Tanaka, his outspoken foreign minister. The move was widely seen by reformers as a sop to conservatives in Koizumi's party.

"There is a concern in Washington that the prime minister is all windup and no pitch, more style than substance," Hamilton said.

Nepal's rebels kill 129 in deadliest assault ever

BY BINAJ GURUBACHARYA
Associated Press Writer

KATMANDU, Nepal — Nepal's rebels staged their deadliest assault ever Sunday, killing at least 129 policemen, soldiers and civilians in attacks on a district headquarters and airport in the nation's northwest, officials said.

The attacks undermine prospects for peace between the government and rebels fighting to overthrow the constitutional monarchy and create a communist republic. Fighting has claimed 2,400 lives since it began in 1996.

The rebels, who previously used knifes and muskets, carried out the attacks with modern weapons that had stolen from the military, state-run Nepal Radio reported.

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba called an emergency Cabinet meeting late Sunday as he prepared to seek an extension of the state of emergency imposed in November after the rebels ended a four-month cease-fire. The rebels, who draw their inspiration from Chinese revolutionary leader Mao Tse-Tung, had said the peace talks had failed to make any progress.

Deuba needs the support of two-thirds of the lawmakers in parliament to get the extension. He was appointed prime minister in July, a month after a palace massacre stunned the nation, leaving the previous king and eight other royals dead.

The latest assault began shortly after midnight when rebels set fire to buildings in Mangalsen, the headquarters of Achham district, about 375 miles northwest of the capital, Katmandu, the government said.

The rebels killed 49 policemen in Mangalsen. Forty-eight Royal Nepalese Army soldiers stationed in the town also died, Defense Ministry spokesman Bhola Silwal said in a news release.

Other victims included the district's chief administrator, Mohan Singh Khadka; an official with the central intelligence bureau and his wife; a postal worker and an unidentified civilian.

The rebels then attacked a small airport in the nearby town of Sanphebaga, killing another 27 policemen standing guard.

A gunbattle between government forces and the rebels began soon after midnight and lasted until morning Sunday, officials said. Police reinforcements rushed to Mangalsen but were delayed by bad weather and the mountainous terrain.

Officials said there could be major casualties on the rebel side as well. They added that fighters were seen taking away the bodies of other guerrillas.

State-run Radio Nepal said the army had taken control of the area and security forces were organizing a massive search for the rebels.

Earlier this month, the U.S. State Department issued an advisory to warn Americans about the rebel attacks in Nepal, including areas visited by Western tourists.

The guerrillas had recently attacked Lukla, the main entry point for the Mount Everest trek, and other popular tourist destinations in the Solu Khumbu Valley, the advisory said.

The violence has also reached Katmandu, where suspected rebels this month set off two bombs in government tax offices, wounding at least 10 people.

The rebels have called a general strike for Feb. 22-23 across Nepal to commemorate the sixth anniversary of their insurgency campaign. They are led by commander Prachanda — whose name means "fierce" in Nepali but whose real name is Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

Crematory charged with theft and deception for un-performed cremations

BY KRISTEN WYATT
Associated Press Writer

NOBLE, Ga. — Distraught families began the wrenching task of trying to identify loved ones Sunday in this rural community where dozens of decomposing corpses were being removed from a crematory.

Authorities said they had recovered 97 bodies — including one infant — from storage sheds and scattered in woods behind Tri-State Crematory in this hamlet about 25 miles south of Chattanooga, Tenn.

The final toll is expected to be at least 200, said Dr. Kris Sperry, Georgia's chief medical examiner. Sixteen people have been identified so far. The discoveries began Friday when a woman walking her dog found a skull.

"We're just barely skimming the surface," Sperry said. "Some of the remains are mummified."

Gov. Roy Barnes declared a state of emergency Saturday so local officials could receive state assistance. He visited Noble Sunday afternoon and had a private meeting with about a hundred people who believed their loved ones were at the crematory.

"They are mad," Barnes said. "They are angry. I would be upset too. "They thought they had closure on the death of a loved one and they do not."

There are 729 crematories and only two inspectors in Georgia, said Gary McConnell, director of the Georgia Emergency Management Agency. He said only crematories that deal directly with the public have to be inspected, and that Tri-State was never inspected because it worked only with funeral homes.

Officials were requesting federal assistance and equipment to help process the remains, a task which has overwhelmed local resources, Sperry said. Investigators believe the crematory had stacked the corpses for up to 15 years.

"They just piled them on top and then piled more on top. And then they just left them," Sperry said. "I wish we had a good explanation for this, but we don't."

The crematory's operator, Ray Brent Marsh, 28, was charged with five counts of theft by deception, a felony, for taking payment for cremations he didn't perform. Walker County and state authorities said other charges are likely against Marsh.

A magistrate released Marsh on Sunday after he posted a $25,000 bond.

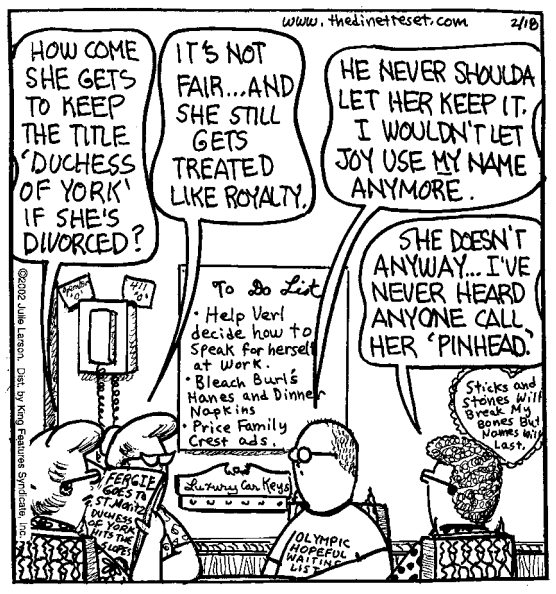
Officials, who have set up a morgue on the site, said they will also search Marsh's entire 16-acre property and a small adjoining lake.

When asked why the bodies had not been cremated, Marsh said the crematory incinerator was not working, Georgia Bureau of Investigation spokesman John Bankhead said late Saturday.

Families on Sunday completed Red Cross paperwork to help identify the bodies and several dentists opened their offices to make dental records available.

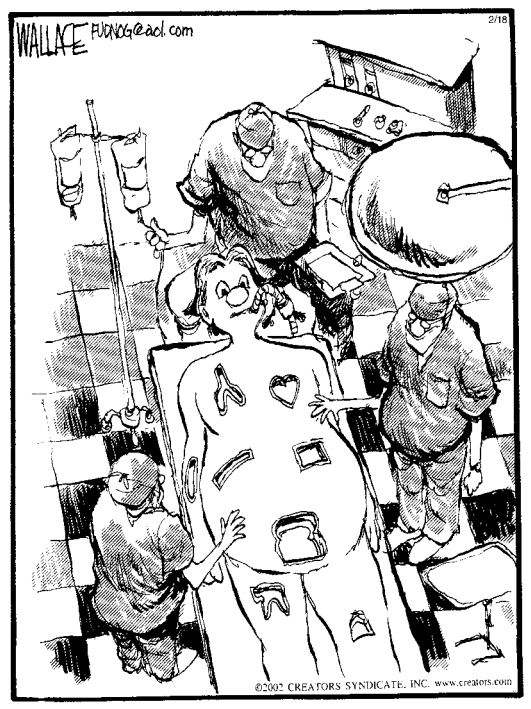
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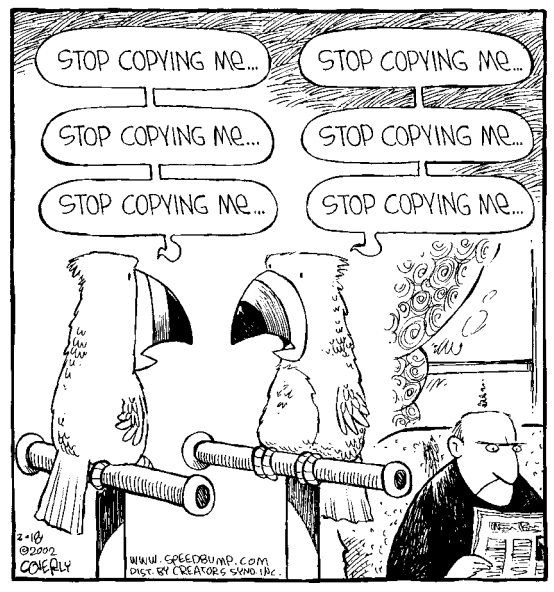
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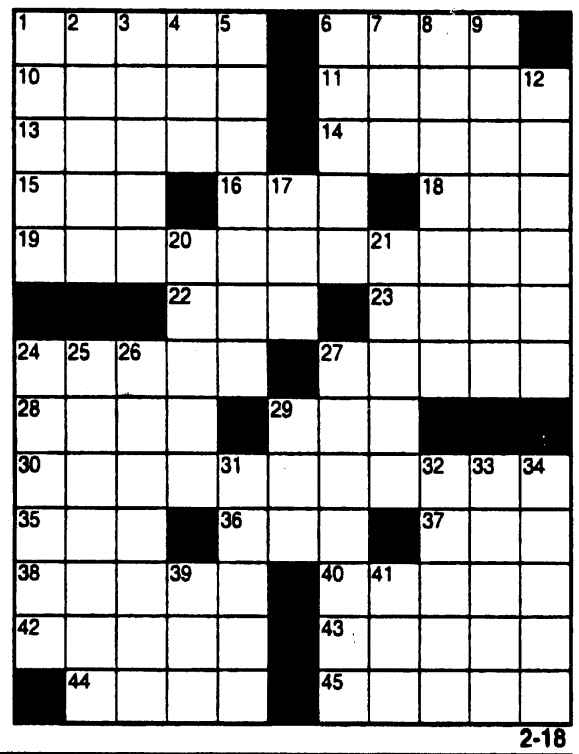
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7 Luggage feature
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12 Baking needs
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20 Misbehave
21 India's first prime minister
24 Honchos
25 Bothered
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33 Singer Cara
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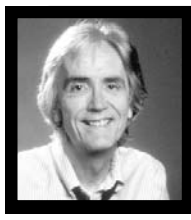
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Saturday's answer



2-18

STUMPED? For answers to today's crossword, call 1-900-454-7377! 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.



NEWS OF THE WEIRD

by Chuck Shepard

Jailhouse sperm yearning to be free

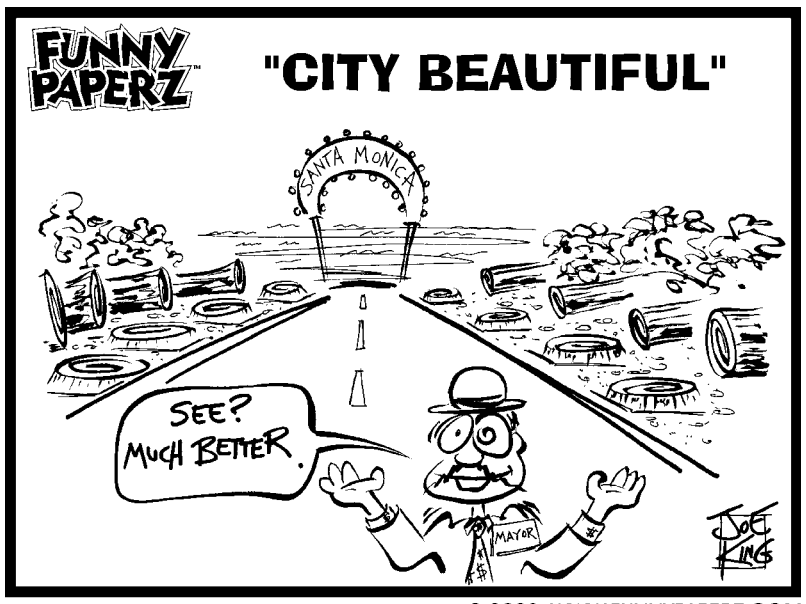
• In September, the U.S. Court of Appeals in San Francisco ruled that federal inmate William Gerber had a constitutional right to procreate and so reinstated Gerber's lawsuit against his warden for preventing him from mailing sperm home to his wife; the future Gerber baby would not only have a questionable genetic legacy (Dad's a recidivist drug and firearms convict) but a single-parent family (Dad's serving 111 years).

• In October, Mexican singer Gloria Trevi, wanted by police at home but jailed in Brazil, was reported to have inseminated herself with smuggled sperm so that, due to pregnancy, she could avoid extradition (Rio de Janeiro).

• The sheriff in Syracuse, N.Y., reported in November that a female inmate had been impregnated by her husband-inmate during a two-minute "contact" visit; the woman said later it took them only 30 seconds, anyway.

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BACK PAGE

Anti-harassment contract made for dating co-workers

BY JUDY LIN
Associated Press Writer

PITTSBURGH — First came the prenuptial agreement for engaged couples. Now co-workers who date can sign a pre-emptive contract of their own, designed to prevent sexual harassment suits.

The legal documents are drafted for people involved in workplace romances who agree to keep their professional and private lives separate should their relationship ever go south.

"It's an acknowledgment by both parties that they're entering into a consensual relationship," said Greg Miller, a Pittsburgh employment lawyer who's drafted a few agreements. "Obviously, this can't work if one or the other is in a marriage."

In a time when unwelcome sexual advances and hostile work environments have generated thousands of complaints, legal experts say this new breed of legal documents can help protect employers from sexual harassment claims.

The concept was first suggested to Miller by a few business clients, who knew some of their workers were dating superiors. Miller, a shareholder at the Pittsburgh law firm Buchanan Ingersoll, said he had heard of the contracts and it made sense to him to document a couple's relationship to protect both parties from unforeseen dating disasters.

"The reality is that everybody works so much and people are getting married later in life. It's not surprising more and more people are meeting in the work force," he said.

Still, the documents are relatively new and haven't been subjected to much debate.

"It's an acknowledgment by both parties that they're entering into a consensual relationship."

— GREG MILLER
Employment lawyer

"I've never heard of anything like this, but it doesn't surprise me that it's out there," said Janis E. Eggleston, a senior staff attorney for the National Employment Lawyers Association. The San Francisco-based group represents clients in employment disputes.

Eggleston said workers considering the agreements shouldn't be so quick to sign on the dotted line.

"I actually think it's a way for an employer not to fulfill their obligations to create an environment free of sexual harassment," Eggleston said.

The number of sexual harassment claims, many stemming from bad breakups, has skyrocketed over the past decade, said Jennifer Kaplan, a spokeswoman for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in Washington.

There were 15,836 sexual harassment complaints filed with the EEOC in 2000, compared with 6,124 in 1990.

The Employment Law Alliance, a California group of labor lawyers, found that 21 percent of women they surveyed recently said they'd been harassed by men in the office.

Nancy L. Heilman, an employment discrimination specialist at the Pittsburgh law firm Cohen & Grigsby, said the best weapon against sexual harassment is employee education.

"I think the safest thing is to train their people and have good policies in place," she said.

Heilman also cautioned that it's unlikely the agreement would constitute a waiver of legal rights.

Miller concedes the agreement doesn't protect either party from being sued, but argues that it serves a purpose by providing documentation in the employer's defense.

Some legal experts also see the potential benefits of the contracts.

"Some offices have no dating policies because it can look bad for a superior to be dating a subordinate," said Dianna Johnston, assistant legal counsel for the EEOC. "But when you have an acknowledgment that it's voluntary, it sort of eliminates that."

Hotel concierge is official greeter of Beverly Hills

By The Associated Press

BEVERLY HILLS — Directions to Gucci in Japanese? Not a problem for Gregg Donovan.

Nor is "Welcome to Beverly Hills" in dozens of other languages for the 42-year-old, who has been hired on as the city's first official greeter.

"I'm waiting for the Dalai Lama to come to town so I can say it in Tibetan," said Donovan, who greets shoppers along Rodeo Drive and adjacent streets.

Clad in a red coachman coat from Sulka, Bally shoes, Versace sunglasses and sporting a Tiffany & Co. gold badge, Donovan looks the part.

That's the point, say officials with the city's conference and visitors bureau, who hope Donovan will help lure back shoppers to some of the nation's ritziest stores, ending an economic slump that hit post Sept. 11.

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