

FREE

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Santa Monica Daily Press

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Affordable housing may be thing of the past

'There is tremendous demand that far, far outstrips supply'

BY ANDREW H. FIXMER
Daily Press Staff Writer

Within the next five to six years, rent control in Santa Monica may be a thing of the past, a city official said recently.

That possibility has left city officials scrambling to build as much affordable housing as possible before the cost of land and rents soar out of reach.

"Whatever is done on the affordable housing end now will only stem the tide a little bit," said Bob Moncrief, the city housing manager. "But it can't make

up what we're losing through vacancy decontrol every year."

Last year the city council named building more affordable housing as one of the city's top five priorities. Council members have asked senior city staff members to dedicate more time and resources to tracking down funding resources for it.

"Economic diversity and multi-cultural richness are what make us Santa Monica, not Beverly Hills by-the-sea," said Councilman Kevin McKeown. "Without affordable housing, Santa Monica will have no room for fixed-income seniors, for kids with single parents, or for the service workers who help our economy thrive."

During the past three years the city has spent \$40 million building more affordable housing. The money

has come from grants from the county, state and federal government, non-profit groups, developer fees and from local taxes revenue.

The city also runs a federally-funded program that gives vouchers to low-wage workers that help pay the difference between the rent they can afford and the going market rate.

However, even with all the city's efforts, Santa Monica is becoming a less and less affordable place for people to live. Current rents tend to be nearly 75 percent more than the rent-controlled rates, a recent city report found.

When a new affordable senior housing complex opened on Fourth Street last month, there were more than 3,000 applications for the building's 66-apart-

See HOUSING, page 3

Local elementary school receives top honors

By Daily Press staff

A team of fourth and fifth graders from Webster Elementary School won first place in the Los Angeles County Science Olympiad.

For the first time ever, elementary school teacher Victoria Winokur entered a team of fifteen children to compete against 39 other schools last month at the California State University -

Northridge.

The groups had been preparing for the competition for the past three months, meeting once a week at lunch and working in teams of two on their own after school.

For the competition, students had to invent a container to protect an egg when it is dropped from a two-story height, build a catapult that will sling a rubber band to a target 25 feet away.

They also had to construct a vehicle out of pasta that would be able to move down a ramp and across the floor without falling apart and make a container that would keep a certain item at a consistent temperature.

Students also had to memorize facts about insects, the eco-cycle of a pond, and demonstrate an understanding of electricity.

Each project and area of knowledge

was judged, and students were awarded points based on their success.

Students participating in the science Olympiad were: Morgan Adams, Greg Lieberman, Sam Block, Jack Pfeiffer, Christie Brydon, Emily Rodriguez, Colin Cadarette, Sam Rubinriot, Athena Denos, Jenna Sherry, Kendall Follert, and Jesse Simmons-Dial.

The alternatives were Olivia Pepper, Searra Silverberg, and Isabel Smith.

Roll 'em out



Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press

Max Barber, of Missouri, loads up cars Tuesday that were headed to Fontana. The cars, owned by Sheridan Toyota, are stored on Sixth Street between Wilshire Boulevard and Arizona Avenue.

Investigation: LAPD, others sold illegal guns

BY PAUL CHAVEZ
Associated Press Writer

LOS ANGELES — A joint investigation has found that police officers from several California law enforcement agencies, including the Los Angeles Police Department, may have been involved in the sale of illegal assault weapons.

It wasn't immediately disclosed how many officers were involved or whether any were suspended.

The Police Department, in a statement released Wednesday night, said detectives launched an investigation before June 2001 into activities surrounding the sale of illegal weapons. Investigators became aware of the activities after conducting routine audits of all gun dealers licensed in the city.

During the investigation, detectives learned that agents from the state Department of Justice were conducting

a similar criminal investigation. The law enforcement agencies later agreed that the state agents would assume the lead role in the probe.

Justice Department spokeswoman Hallye Jordan confirmed the agency's investigation into the selling of illegal assault weapons has led to evidence that law enforcement officers may have been involved in their illegal purchase and transfer.

In early December, the agency arrested two people, including a Los Angeles County sheriff's deputy, Jordan said.

Deputy Kresimir Kovac, 33, was charged with one count of conspiracy to offer an assault weapon for sale, four counts of illegally offering for sale or selling assault weapons and 18 counts of illegal possession of an assault weapon, said Orange County District Attorney spokeswoman Tori Richards.

See INVESTIGATION, page 3

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Santa Monica's Daily Calendar



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Get your Learn on!
Shiatsu Massage School of California presents "DOIN" Self-Healing Workshop every Friday from 5:30 p.m.-6:30 p.m. *DOIN* is effective in increasing one's natural healing power through fetal (Tanden) breathing, Microcosmic meditation, Chi Kong, Eight steps Brocade, and Ampuku (abdominal massage), according to healers. Taught by Dr. DoAnn T. Kaneko. 2309 Main Street, Santa Monica. (310) 396-4877.

Big Event!
Mikhail Gorbachev, founder and President of Green Cross International - will salute environmental leaders, including Woody Harrelson, at the 6th Annual Millennium Awards tonight at the Ritz-Carlton in Marina Del Rey. 6:00 p.m. Cocktail Reception and Silent Eco-Auction. 7:00 p.m. Organic Dinner and Award presentation. Ticket prices start at \$500 RSVP (310) 394-7700 x111. Ritz-Carlton Marina Del Rey, 4375 Admiralty Way.



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HOROSCOPE

Gemini, be where your friends are



JACQUELINE BIGAR'S STARS

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

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

 **ARIES (March 21-April 19)**
★★★★ Your happy ways will take you far if you are willing to experiment and express yourself differently. Be careful how you diffuse your temper. Curb a tendency to hit the dog because you're angry at the cat. Detach from a problem, taking an overview. Tonight: Let others come to you.

 **LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)**
★★★★ Others seek you out. Prioritize your desires, as you quickly discover that it is a fast-moving day. Think in terms of gains and a possible new direction. You can ask the right question, but taking the lead right now won't be as successful. Tonight: Accept an invitation.

 **TAURUS (April 20-May 20)**
★★★★ Take your time making a financial decision. What someone offers seems to be out of whack to you. You might not be able to convince an associate of the rightness of your thinking. Choose your words carefully. Deal with this person directly. Tonight: Do your thing.

 **SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)**
★★★★ All work and no play won't make you happy. You discover that others do their best to lighten you up. Go for another approach. Discussions surround a potential trip or a new venture. Open up to an associate, expressing your nurturing nature. Tonight: Relax at home with a loved one.

 **GEMINI (May 21-June 20)**
★★★★ Your smiling ways make you a sure winner. Others seek you out en masse. Realize that brainstorming leads to more income and certainly attention. The boss likes what he or she sees. Curb a self-destructive tendency that keeps emerging. Tonight: Where your friends are.

 **SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)**
★★★★ Express your playfulness through a more upbeat and happy approach. You find that others easily respond to you. You could be on overdrive, pushing yourself way too hard. Return calls at a leisurely pace at the end of the day. Tonight: Sign up for dance lessons.

 **CANCER (June 21-July 22)**
★★★★ Your upbeat assessment of a project marks you as a leader. Others come to you to try out their suggestions. Find answers and get past a problem. You can no longer hold yourself back. Allow humor to play a bigger role with a touchy friend. Tonight: The lead actor.

 **CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)**
★★★★ Inevitably, pressure develops in your personal life as you seem ready to firm up an important business deal. You might not have as much control as you would like. Separate work from your personal life. Screen your calls if need be. Tonight: Order in a favorite.

 **LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)**
★★★★ Take in a different perspective. You also might not choose to share what you see with a demanding associate. You could find this person rather touchy or combative. Partners seem to be in the position to present the same ideas in a better way. Tonight: Take off as soon as you can.

 **AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)**
★★★★ How you approach someone could change substantially with good news. You act lighter, and you feel lighter. You get rid of a burden because of your high energy and enthusiasm. Don't antagonize someone close to you unless you want to have a difficult weekend. Tonight: Join your friends.

 **VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)**
★★★★ Allow others to make the first overture. Clearly someone doesn't need to agree with you. Discussions pave the way as to how to approach this person. You actually want the same things. Your resourcefulness bubbles forth from deep within. Tonight: Follow another's lead.

 **PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)**
★★★★ If you are not careful, you will figure out new ways of spending money. Gain insight through brainstorming with a money expert. You could have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Choose your words with care; you could irritate someone. Tonight: Your treat.

 **QUOTE of the DAY**

“The rich are the scum of the earth in every country.”

— G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936)

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LOCAL



Michelle Rodriguez prefers role as 'tough chick'

'Girlfight' star wants to be listened to, not leered at

BY SEAN DALY
Special to the Daily Press

Michelle Rodriguez relaxes in blue denim jeans and a black sleeveless tank top. Her hair is pulled tight in a ponytail, and she is wearing little makeup.

Not surprisingly, this is how the Texas-born actress feels most relaxed.

"I don't want people thinking of me sexually," said Rodriguez, who began to develop something of a "touch-chick" reputation two summers ago, after beating out 350 hopefuls for the lead role of Diana Guzman in the movie "Girlfight."

"I don't want people to be like, 'God, she's hot looking. Look at her in that shirt with her tits showing.' I want them to listen to me for what I'm saying."

"And I think the best way to do that is to sniff my armpits, and sit up and burp every now and then."

Rodriguez, 23, has never been afraid to mince words.

She is outspoken about sex, relationships, even politics, admitting, "I don't vote. I'm gonna live my life the way everyone else does — in ignorance."

"I want them to listen to me for what I'm saying. And I think the best way to do that is to sniff my armpits, and sit up and burp every now and then."

— MICHELLE RODRIGUEZ
Actress

Just don't even get her started about gender roles. "Masculine, at least in my eyes, means acting on impulse," she said, in between sips of Perrier water.

"When you're feminine, most of the time it means you are using your sexuality to get what you want."

That's something Rodriguez maintained she'll never do.

"(Growing up), I was always considered a bit butch. In fact, I cultivated the image. It was my defiance against having to be a sex object like the other girls in my class. The boys considered me to be 'one of the guys' until I finally developed breasts."

Today, Rodriguez maintains a no-nonsense policy when it comes to men and dating.

"I feel that if anybody wants to like me or wants to have a relationship with me, I shouldn't have to woo them with my tits or my ass or cross my legs 'Basic Instinct'-style in order to get what I want," she said.

Rodriguez, rumored last year to be romancing actor Vin Diesel, her co-star from "The Fast and The Furious," has a firm stance against appearing in mens' magazines such as Maxim and Gear — even though she knows it could help to broaden her audience and further propel her career.

"I don't use my sexuality to attract anybody," she said.

See RODRIGUEZ, page 8

Revelations the latest blow to scandal-plagued LAPD

INVESTIGATION, from page 1

Kovac has pleaded innocent to the charges.

The Sheriff's Department did not return a call seeking comment, but Kovac's lawyer said the deputy is a seven-year veteran who was being considered for a medal of valor when he was placed on administrative leave pending the outcome of this case.

"When this case gets into court and all facts are presented, he'll be completely vindicated and absolutely innocent of all the charges filed against him," said attorney, Melvyn Douglas Sacks.

Gun dealer Lawrence Wolff, 46, faces one count of conspiracy to offer an assault weapon for sale and five counts involving weapons possession, Richards said.

Wolff has been released without bail pending his arraignment on March 21 in Santa Ana Central Courthouse. Kovac also returns to court that day.

"The prosecution of Lawrence Wolff, an honest and law-abiding firearms dealer, is accomplished for the sole purpose of concealing corruption within the Los Angeles Police Department," said his lawyer, Robert W. Walters.

Jordan didn't disclose the type of guns involved in the investigations, but the state's ban on assault weapons targets dozens of guns with a high rate of fire,

including the Chinese-made AK-series of rifles and Intreated TEC-9 pistols.

An amendment to the law last year provided law enforcement officers with an exemption that allows them to buy assault weapons if the officer has been authorized by his employer to do so.

A state Department of Justice source speaking on condition of anonymity said the case involves forged LAPD documents investigators believe were used to purchase guns under that exemption.

The Los Angeles Police Department's Internal Affairs Group has joined the probe, but has deferred its administrative

investigation until the criminal probe is complete.

The Police Department declined to comment further on the investigation, referring questions to the state Department of Justice.

The revelation that LAPD officers may have illegally obtained assault weapons is the latest blow to the scandal-plagued agency.

The Police Department agreed in 2000 to adhere to a consent decree that installed a federal monitor to oversee reforms aimed at correcting what the U.S. Justice Department called a pattern of civil rights

abuses.

Attention on the department intensified in 1999 when former Officer Rafael Perez told authorities about misconduct within the Rampart station's anti-gang unit in exchange for a lighter sentence for stealing cocaine from an evidence room.

More than 100 convictions have been thrown out as a result of Perez's revelations that officers beat, robbed and framed innocent people. Nine officers have been fired or resigned, two officers have pleaded guilty and the city has been forced to pay tens of millions of dollars to settle dozens of lawsuits.

'Critical need' for affordable housing

HOUSING, from page 1

ments, Moncrief said.

"There are far fewer affordable units because of rent-decontrol," Moncrief said. "So when affordable units become available there is tremendous demand that far, far outstrips supply."

Community Corporation of Santa Monica, the largest provider of affordable housing in the city, maintains a waiting list of 3,200 households for only 150 possible openings this year.

The non-profit organization is currently building three new apartment

complexes in the Ocean Park, Midcity and Sunset Park neighborhoods and rehabilitating another 10 buildings throughout the city.

While the rehabilitated units will become available within the year, the new buildings probably won't be completed for another three to four years.

"But even by fixing up those buildings that we bought, most of them are already occupied," said Joan Ling, executive director of Community Corporation. "Unfortunately, its not going to help very much in creating new

housing."

At Community Corporation, over one-third of their applicants for affordable housing either already live or work in Santa Monica. But if the organization accepts state or federal funds for a particular project, they cannot give priority to residents.

"There is a critical need out there, as evidenced by the high number of these applications, and the supply is just paltry," Ling said. "It seems we need to try a lot harder to deliver the housing that's needed."



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Feds clash with SF authorities over medical pot law

BY MARTHA MENDOZA

AP National Writer

SAN FRANCISCO — “Liar! Liar!” came the voices from the crowd.

Drug Enforcement Agency Administrator Asa Hutchinson stopped short, caught midsentence. He had started by saying: “Science has told us so far there is no medical benefit for smoking marijuana ...”

Hutchinson pushed on with his message, reiterating President Bush’s newly aggressive anti-drug policy, which links casual drug use to terrorism and objects to state laws like California’s that allow the medicinal use of marijuana.

Just hours before Hutchinson’s appearance Feb. 12, federal agents — with no help from San Francisco police — seized more than 600 pot plants from a medicinal

marijuana club. They also arrested the group’s executive director and three suppliers, including pot guru Ed Rosenthal, author of “Ask Ed: Marijuana Law. Don’t Get Busted.”

The federal raids have angered and alarmed local officials in San Francisco.

On the day Hutchinson spoke, a half-dozen city officials joined a boisterous street protest against the DEA. Even District Attorney Terence Hallinan grabbed a bullhorn and criticized the raids, as demonstrators, some in wheelchairs and on crutches, chanted, “DEA, Go away!” and pot smoke wafted through the air.

Opponents of Washington’s stand on marijuana said the raids may be a precursor to showdowns in at least seven other states that have also passed laws in con-

flict with the federal ban on pot.

“I think the goals here are to stomp out this emerging political movement once and for all,” said Keith Stroup, director of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws. “The way they’re trying to do that is to come into San Francisco, at the heart of the legalization movement, and arrest, prosecute and jail the major players.”

DEA spokesman Richard Meyers in San Francisco countered: “You know, personally my heart goes out to someone who has cancer or AIDS, and I’m sure they’re just trying to alleviate their pain, but federal law does not make a distinction between medical marijuana and marijuana, and the DEA has a commitment and duty to the public to enforce the law.”

In recent months, federal agents have

raided three other cannabis clubs in California, seizing a garden of marijuana grown for sick people in Hollywood and taking away the records of 5,000 medical marijuana users from a doctor’s office near Sacramento.

For nine months after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled last May that there is no medical exception to the federal law against marijuana, federal agents had avoided San Francisco.

Under a law passed by California voters in 1996, marijuana clubs can dispense pot to people with cancer, AIDS or other chronic illnesses to relieve pain and nausea.

The Supreme Court ruled that federal anti-drug laws supersede laws allowing medicinal marijuana in Alaska, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Nevada, Oregon and Washington.

Parents drank, smoked pot the night Danielle disappeared

BY BEN FOX

Associated Press Writer

SAN DIEGO — The parents of Danielle van Dam were smoking marijuana and drinking in the hours before they discovered their 7-year-old daughter missing from their suburban home.

At times holding back tears, Brenda and Damon van Dam testified Thursday that they smoked marijuana with friends before she spent several hours at a local bar the night 7-year-old Danielle vanished. Her husband stayed home with their children.

Shortly after taking the stand, Brenda paused and appeared to tear up when asked how many children she has. “Three,” she answered, referring to her two sons and Danielle, whose body was found along a rural road last month.

The testimony came during a preliminary hearing to determine whether David Westerfield, 50, will stand trial on charges of kidnapping, murder and possession of child pornography. Brenda said he was at the same neighborhood bar and watched her and her friends play pool the night of Feb. 1.

Under cross-examination by the defense, Brenda at times grew frustrated and repeatedly said she couldn’t recall details about events surrounding her daughter’s disappearance.

Westerfield, who has pleaded innocent, remained impassive as van Dam recalled their brief encounters before Danielle’s abduction.

During questioning by prosecutor Jeff Dusek, van Dam recalled first meeting Westerfield in 2001 when she and her daughter went to his home in their north San Diego neighborhood to sell Girl Scout cookies.

She had little contact with the twice-divorced engineer, who lived two doors away, until a weekend night in January when she ran into him at a local bar while she was out with two girlfriends.

Days later, she went to Westerfield’s home with Danielle and one of her sons to again sell Girl Scout cookies, she said. As the children explored the home, van Dam said she chatted with Westerfield.

He said he often hosted “adult parties” and barbecues and invited van Dam and her husband.

She said she thought it odd Westerfield mentioned “adult parties.”

“I didn’t know what he meant by that,” she testified.

Under cross-examination, defense attorney Steven Feldman suggested she and her husband engaged in “swinging,” in which spouses have sex with other adults,

but the judge ruled the line of questioning was irrelevant.

Much of the testimony focused on the night of Danielle’s disappearance.

Brenda van Dam and two girlfriends met at the home Feb. 1 and shared a marijuana cigarette in her garage before going out. Damon came into the garage briefly smoked some marijuana, then went back inside to play video games with their sons while Danielle read a book.

Damon testified he drank three beers that night and that he did not tell police about the marijuana in the first interviews after Danielle’s disappearance.

The three women returned to the bar where she had seen Westerfield the weekend before. They saw Westerfield again, he bought drinks for them and later watched them play pool.

Ignitions make Saturns easy to steal

BY SCOTT SONNER

Associated Press Writer

RENO, Nev. — Police investigating the theft of at least 26 Saturn vehicles in the Reno area over the past two months arrested two suspects Thursday and picked up some tips on the tricks of their trade.

“The ignition in these particular cars apparently is easy to defeat with an item like a fingernail file being forced in. That makes them easy to take,” Reno Deputy Police Chief

Jim Weston said.

“It has become real popular around here apparently since people started telling other people how they were doing it,” he said.

A Saturn of Reno spokesman referred questions to corporate officials. A spokeswoman for the Saturn Corp., a subsidiary of General Motors, said she wasn’t aware of such a quirk in the ignition system.

“It seems odd to me that our ignition systems would be exclusive,” she said.

Most of the vehicles in the Reno area were recovered within a few days of being reported stolen earlier this month and in February.

“Most of them were either sold for \$50 to be used for a day or two or they were just driven around for the day,” Weston said.

Police arrested Jeff Berrey, 35, Reno, and Dawn Brunner, 29, Reno, on Thursday thanks in part to callers to a secret witness hot line, he said.

The case remains under investigation.

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STATE □ NATIONAL

Immigration clerk arrested for making phony permits

BY BEN FOX
Associated Press Writer

SAN DIEGO — A document clerk at a busy downtown immigration office was arrested Thursday for allegedly selling counterfeit work permits.

Federal agents arrested Ruben Marquez, who worked in a department that produced the permits, at his home in Chula Vista. Two men who allegedly escorted illegal immigrants to the office to get the counterfeits, and collected fees of up to \$4,500 for each one, also were arrested.

Marquez, 27, was arrested on one count of suspicion to manufacture false documents but authorities believe he may have produced at least 40 fake work permits, said Joseph Artes, head of the Justice Department's Office of the Inspector General in San Diego.

Marquez was hired as a student clerk and worked since last year as a clerk at the Immigration and Naturalization Service office in downtown San Diego. Hundreds of people wait in line each day outside the office for permits to stay or work in the United States.

Investigators said the false documents

Marquez allegedly issued could not be detected as counterfeit because he had access to the machine that produced them.

The INS and inspector general began investigating after receiving a tip from an informant about a clerk at the downtown office who claimed that, for a fee, he could issue what is formally known as an Employment Authorization Document.

Marquez arranged to meet customers outside the federal building and would escort them to his basement office to take their photos and process their work permits. He told investigators he received \$400 of the \$4,500 total price charged to the illegal immigrants, Artes said.

Two other men, Jeovanny Pascano, 35, of San Diego and Miguel Flores, 28, of Chula Vista allegedly found those seeking the illegal work permits and escorted them to the immigration office.

All three men are in custody and are expected to be arraigned Friday in federal court. The conspiracy charge carries a maximum of five years in prison.

Flores also faces drug charges after federal agents found marijuana and cocaine at his home.

Utah Supreme Court to hear case against lesbian teacher

BY RICH VOSEPKA
Associated Press Writer

SALT LAKE CITY — A high school teacher is defending herself against a claim that discussing her sexual orientation in front of students is prohibited, just as encouraging them to use drugs would be.

The American Civil Liberties Union filed court papers with the Utah Supreme Court on Thursday in support of Wendy Weaver, a longtime psychology teacher at Spanish Fork High School who is a lesbian.

She has been sued by a group of parents and students who argue that state law requires her to keep quiet about homosexuality in class.

"In our view, the case amounts to nothing more than continuing harassment against a teacher who asserted her First Amendment rights," said Richard Van Wagoner, a Salt Lake City lawyer who is assisting the ACLU with Weaver's case.

Fourth District Judge Ray Harding dismissed the case against Weaver in 1999. But her detractors appealed to the state Supreme Court last year.

They say the judge made a mistake.

"There are mandatory standards that say teachers are to model morality," attorney Matthew Hilton said. Teachers are prohibited from supporting criminal conduct by students — and sodomy is against the law in Utah, he said.

Just as a teacher couldn't encourage students to smoke marijuana or drive drunk, Weaver shouldn't be allowed to have gay issues "become intertwined with the teaching experience," Hilton said.

Weaver won a federal civil rights lawsuit against the Nebo School District in 1998 after the school required her to sign an agreement that barred her from discussing her sexual orientation — in or out of the classroom.

"There are mandatory standards that say teachers are to model morality."

— MATTHEW HILTON
Attorney

That case drew national attention. Weaver has continued to teach at the school, which is about 45 miles south of Salt Lake City.

The latest case in state court was brought by a group of parents and students who want her out of the classroom.

Another legal question for the Supreme Court to decide will be whether those people have any legal standing to sue an individual teacher.

Hilton argues that the Legislature has made it clear that they do.

The ACLU claims that decisions about who's fit to teach should be made by the state school board and licensing officials. Those groups have refused to take any action against Weaver, said Stephen Clark, legal director for the ACLU of Utah.



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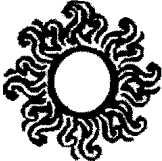
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NATIONAL

Bankruptcy an option for Arthur Andersen, experts say

BY DAVE CARPENTER

AP Business Writer

CHICAGO — Filing for bankruptcy may be the best option for Arthur Andersen LLP, experts say, if the accounting firm hopes to stop an exodus of clients and employees, and find a buyer to salvage its operations.

A Chapter 11 federal bankruptcy filing, while dire, could help the firm's chances of swiftly resolving civil liabilities linked to Andersen's role as chief auditor for Enron.

But such a move would almost certainly signal the end of its 94 years as an independent company, according to those who track the industry.

"A bankruptcy would be a business strategy to save and protect as many jobs and assets as possible. But it means Andersen itself is done," said Arthur Bowman, editor of the industry publication Bowman's Accounting Report.

Thursday's criminal indictment by a federal grand jury may already effectively spell its demise, Bowman and other observers said.

"I don't see an independent Arthur Andersen in the future, no matter what they do," said Michael Perino, a securities law expert at St. John's University law

school in New York. "Arthur Andersen's reputation is so sullied right now that ... if they do file a bankruptcy action, the only likely outcome is that the remaining pieces get bought up by somebody."

Andersen, indicted on obstruction of justice charges for shredding Enron-related documents, declined comment on the possibility of bankruptcy — a prospect it reportedly held out in merger talks with other Big Five accounting firms this week.

"We are looking at many different options, both inside and outside the profession, and working on many reforms to set a new standard for audit quality and restoring public confidence," spokesman Patrick Dorton said.

In an effort to restore its tarnished reputation, Andersen recruited former Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volcker in early February to lead an oversight board that would make sweeping reforms at the firm.

Volcker's board released its first set of reforms on Monday, which included splitting Andersen into separate accounting and auditing units, but the fate of the reform process is uncertain now that Andersen has been indicted and its future is in doubt.

Volcker, speaking in an interview just

minutes before the indictment against Andersen was announced, said that on Wednesday he had told a panel of experts he had assembled for his three-member board that the outlook for Andersen was "rather dim."

"A bankruptcy would be a business strategy to save and protect as many jobs and assets as possible. But it means Andersen itself is done."

— AURTHUR BOWMAN

Editor of the industry publication Bowman's Accounting Report

But the panel decided that it would stay together in order to promote reforms in the accounting industry even if Andersen went under, Volcker said.

A Chapter 11 filing would enable the Chicago-based company to convert the more than three dozen lawsuits filed against it into bankruptcy claims. Its earlier-rejected offer of as much as \$750 million to settle all claims might get new consideration, since claimants would otherwise be faced with waiting in line in bankruptcy court behind banks and other secured lenders.

"Going into Chapter 11 is in everybody's interest except competitors'," said Ashish Nanda, an associate professor at Harvard Business School. "It might stop

the vicious cycle of clients walking away and of that leading to professionals and partners walking away."

Numerous Fortune 500 clients have fired Andersen as their auditor — Delta Air Lines, FedEx Corp., Freddie Mac, Household International, Merck & Co. and SunTrust Banks in the past two weeks — and more are considering doing so.

Some of the clients who are worried about Andersen collapsing may stay on if the company goes under federal bankruptcy protection, Nanda said, because of the difficulties for large corporations in switching auditors.

But turning the Big Five into the Final Four would result in less competition in the auditing market. Perino said that means auditing fees would rise, especially if firms are not allowed to perform auditing and consulting for the same company. The only comparable precedent to Andersen's situation is when Laventhol & Horwath — then the nation's seventh-largest accounting firm — filed for bankruptcy and collapsed under malpractice lawsuits. Andersen, formerly the world's biggest accountant, is now No. 5.

Jonathan Hamilton, editor of Public Accounting Report, an industry publication, said Andersen's collapse is resulting from more than one scandal.

"This isn't just Enron dragging them to the pavement here — it's Sunbeam, Waste Management, Baptist Fund, Global Crossing," he said, citing other mishandled audit accounts.

"It's kind of like the boxer — is it the one final punch that puts them out or the 500 over six rounds? It's the beating they've taken."

Birth certificate shows Miss Cleo hails from California

By The Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — A birth certificate obtained by the state shows the woman marketed on cable television as Jamaican psychic Miss Cleo was actually born in Los Angeles, the daughter of American parents.

Miss Cleo — Caribbean accent and colorful clothing aside — was born Youree Dell Harris on Aug. 13, 1962, in Los Angeles County Hospital, the document shows. Her parents were from California and Texas.

The state has sued Harris challenging her to prove she really is a renowned shaman from Jamaica. At the same time, the state and Federal Trade Commission have sued two Fort Lauderdale companies — Access Resource Services Inc. and Psychic Readers Network — for fraud. The FTC says it acted after getting more than 2,000 complaints.

"We sought this document because the

company has gone to great lengths to say that Miss Cleo is a master shaman from Jamaica," David Aronberg, an assistant attorney general, told the South Florida Sun-Sentinel for a story Thursday. The newspaper used Florida's open records law to get a copy of the document from the state.

Harris appears on national infomercials promising insights into love, money and other personal matters.

Authorities allege the psychic service misrepresented costs, billed customers for services they never bought, harassed consumers with unwanted telemarketing calls and responded to complaints with threats and abuse.

Harris' attorney, William Cone Jr., said he didn't want to debate the birth certificate's validity.

Cone has said Harris should not be party to the lawsuit because, as a contractor of Access Resource, she should not have to defend herself.

Comet last seen in 1661

By The Associated Press

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — Astronomers say a comet that was last seen in 1661 will be at its brightest during the next few weeks.

Comet Ikeya-Zhang is named for the two amateur astronomers who spotted it independently on Feb. 1. The sighting was recently reported in Sky & Telescope magazine. The comet is the sixth one to be spotted by longtime skywatcher Kaoru Ikeya, who lives in central Japan.

Ikeya saw the comet low in the sky just after sunset; in China's Henan province, Daqing Zhang saw it about 90 minutes later.

Experts believe this is the same unnamed comet as one recorded in 1661, meaning it is returning after a 341-year orbit. One Japanese newspaper announced Ikeya's find under the headline, "Could it be the same comet seen by the samurai lords?"

Throughout the Northern Hemisphere, Comet Ikeya-Zhang is visible low in the western sky just after sunset. In early April, it will appear in the predawn sky as it begins to loop past Earth on its return trip out of the solar system.



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A STEP AHEAD OF THE INDUSTRY

NATIONAL



American Express yanks Arkansas credit cards

BY KELLY WIESE
Associated Press Writer

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — American Express sent a message to the state of Arkansas recently: Sorry, card rejected.

In a sweeping action that came without warning, the company suspended all 6,400 of the state employee corporate cards because of unpaid charges totaling more than \$800,000, half of that overdue at least four months.

Holders of the cards — from staffers in the governor's office to low-level administrators — found out about the action at restaurants, hotels and airports. Some were stranded, and one University of Arkansas official had to find another way to buy lunch for someone he was trying to recruit to the faculty.

"It was embarrassing," said David Martinson, an account administrator for the university. "People had to make lots of accommodations to work around it."

Cards in good standing were reinstated within days of the Jan. 30 suspension, but the experience has a state committee re-examining the special accounts that let cardholders charge personal purchases as well as those for state business.

American Express said the corporate cards, used by Fortune 500 companies and nearly every state government, allow employees to cover anticipated travel and business expenses without obtaining money in advance.

The employees must meet standard credit and salary requirements to qualify for the cards, but are solely

responsible for paying off their charges.

American Express spokeswoman Melissa Abernathy said the mass suspension was extremely rare but necessary. She said that in eight years with the company, she has never before encountered such an across-the-board suspension of a state corporate account.

Arkansas accounting administrator Tom Smith said about 1,000 state workers were delinquent, some more than 120 days, and the state's contract with American Express gives it the right to suspend all cards without notice if more than 1 percent of cardholders are more than two months past due.

Smith said he did not have a breakdown on which agencies had the most employees with delinquent accounts, what the charges were for or why the bills had not been paid.

Officials said it was not the state's fault. They said the state reimbursed its employees for their expenses in a timely fashion.

"We were paying them properly," said Department of Human Services spokesman Joe Quinn. "The money would go into their personal hands, and some of them were getting behind paying the credit card company back."

The state committee is considering using some other method of paying employee expenses. A travel-advance fund is a possibility. It is considering canceling its 16-year deal with American Express.

"If we're going to have the risk of having people stranded traveling, we need to re-evaluate what we're going to offer to employees," said Tim Leathers, deputy director of the state Department of Finance and Administration.

Sudden outbreaks of pink eye worry university officials

BY STEPHEN FROTHINGHAM
Associated Press Writer

CONCORD, N.H. — Hundreds of students at Dartmouth College and Princeton University have contracted pink eye infections, and experts fear the outbreak could spread during spring breaks.

More than 250 Princeton students have reported symptoms of conjunctivitis since officials began tracking the infections last month.

At Dartmouth, the number is nearing 500, and another 500 students may have had the infection and not reported it, said Dr. Jack Turco of Dartmouth's student health center.

That number is at least five times higher than usual, and the rate isn't easing as students leave this week for spring break, Turco said.

"Some students are just developing pink eye now. There is a possibility it will blossom in the different places they go during their break," Turco said. He urged other schools to watch for signs of the infection.

Pink eye can cause a pink or red discoloration of the eyes, irritation, swelling, blurry vision, sticky eyelids and increased sensitivity to light.

The infection, which can be treated by antibiotic ointment, typically lasts three to four days and is most often caused by a virus and accompanied by a cold.

However, the Dartmouth outbreak is bacterial and spreads quickly, and that has drawn attention of scientists, Turco said. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and New Hampshire health officials were expected to report their findings Friday.

"This is not a serious illness, but if some of the properties of this bacteria were transferred to a more dangerous bacteria, that would be dangerous," Turco said.

Tests are being conducted to determine if the outbreak at Princeton is bacterial or viral and whether the outbreaks are related.

The Princeton outbreak represents about double what is normally reported there, said Janet A. Neglia of Princeton University Health Services.

Pink eye is spread through eye secretions, hands and breath. Students were warned to avoid sharing towels or drinking glasses and to wash their hands frequently.

Officials said the outbreaks could be connected because students travel between the Ivy League campuses to visit friends and their sports teams have competed in recent weeks.



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LOCAL

Actress: 'People take me the wrong way constantly'

RODRIGUEZ, from page 3

"I can take my shirt off right now (in a magazine) and it'll come out and some newspaper will be like, 'Michelle liberated herself.' I had a couple of offers to do some hot scenes in the shower with some guy and make it real hot and sexy, you know? The next thing you know, I'd be the next J-Lo or something...I'd rather be stereotyped as a tough dyke than as a complete slut."

That's one reason Rodriguez chose to appear in the new action-thriller "Resident Evil."

She stars with Milla Javovich as part of an elite, futuristic team that sets out to battle a rouge computer and its minions.

"Resident Evil" is the latest in a series of films based on popular video games and has already caught the eye of some concerned parents.

"When you take away the nudity and the curses, it's no different from any other action film that kids have seen," Rodriguez said. "I don't think it's that much racier than 'The Fast and The Furious'...except for the guts and the gore."

Rodriguez, who likened the video game to a Hitchcock movie, lobbied hard to land the role of Rain. She recalled telling director Paul Anderson, "I don't care if I'm selling a hot dog as a zombie in your movie, please put me in."

What Anderson may not have known at the time, was that Rodriguez had her heart set on the role of Lara Croft in another video game adaptation, "Tomb Raider."

"(The producers of that movie) said I could kick butt, but my boobs were too small," she said. "Then they turned around and padded Angelina Jolie anyway! But I consider getting 'Resident Evil' as karmic consolation. I think 'Tomb Raider' was meant to be Angelina's movie."

Rodriguez made the best of her time on location in London and Berlin, often joking with Jovovich, a former fashion model.

"Mila tried to get me to wear makeup and dress more feminine," the actress said, laughing. "She discovered very quickly that's a lost cause. I am who I am, and glamour and image play no part in it."

A movie extra in such films as "Summer of Sam" and "The Cradle Will Rock," Rodriguez spent time in Texas, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, before relocating for the final time to Jersey City, New Jersey at age 11.

By 14, she was riding shotgun with her boyfriend on the streets of nearby Hunt's Point, where he would illegally race his Mazda RX-7.

"I was a rebel growing up," she admitted. "I got kicked out of six schools. But I don't think that makes me less of an intellect. You know, if you ever crave knowledge, there is always a library. The Dewey Decimal System really works. So that's all I needed to know."

Rodriguez did take a quick stab at business school, but dropped out after just four months.

"I just didn't want to be a puppet of society, stuck in an office, craving sunlight," she said.

Sharing a home with her mother and grandmother, Rodriguez was raised a Jehovah's Witness until age 14.

"That was a very morally intense religion," she said. "Although they keep you from experiencing a lot of the bad things that can really hurt you out there in the world, they are also depriving you from experiencing life."

Rodriguez eventually stopped practicing the faith, noting that taboos against profanity and sexual situations would have made it all but impossible for her to accept the role in "Girlfight."

Meanwhile, friends and family were more concerned that the physical contact in that film would land Rodriguez in the hospital.

"You are gonna get whacked and your teeth are gonna fall off," she remembered one friend warning.

But Rodriguez, who has since developed a passion for skydiving, was unafraid.

Of course, she admitted there a few situations that do make her tingle nervously.

"Every time I go on a rollercoaster ride I still feel the same," she said. "When it's clanking and clanking and I reach the peak and I'm like, 'Aw, s--t, not again!'"

There are a few other secrets Rodriguez tries to not to advertise — for one she is completely lost in the kitchen.

"Don't ever come over to my house and expect me to cook," said the actress, who still shares a New jersey home with her mother. "I spend most of my time in Japanese restaurants eating vegetables."

And yes, despite her sometime hard-as-nails shell, there are even things that can bring a tear to this tough girl's eyes.

"I cried during 'Bambi,'" she said. "I cried at 'The Lion King.' And I cry every time I watch TV and see the kids in Africa. Anyone who knows how to love cries."

That's the mystique of Rodriguez. No one seems to have her quite figured out.

"I'm just a big misunderstood love ball," she said, laughing. "People take me the wrong way constantly."

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INTERNATIONAL



Goodbye Yugoslavia, hello Serbia-Montenegro

BY DUSAN STOJANOVIC
Associated Press Writer

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia — Agreeing to wipe the name Yugoslavia from the map of Europe, the federation's two remaining republics committed Thursday to forming a loose joint state with a new name: Serbia and Montenegro.

The radically restructured alliance — mediated by the European Union and approved in a historic accord signed by top Serbian and Montenegrin leaders — aims to ease years of feuding between the republics and help the volatile Balkan region focus on much-needed economic reforms.

It was a major policy victory for the United States and the EU, which feared the discord would lead to a further fragmentation of the region that is returning to peace after more than a decade of war.

However, many Serb and Montenegrin nationalists were unhappy with the accord and could pose a challenge to its ratification.

"We went to bed in one state, and we woke up in another," said Branko Ruzic, spokesman for the party of former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic.

The two semi-independent states will share a common defense and foreign policy but will maintain separate economies, currencies and customs services — at least for the time being. After three years, both states will be free to organize refer-

endums on independence and secede if they so choose.

The political accord also calls for elections for a new parliament in the fall. This legislature will replace the current bicameral parliament with one chamber in which the two entities will be equally represented. The legislatures of both republics, as well as the existing parliament, must endorse the accord by June, when the country's name will also be formally changed.

"This document sets the shape of completely new relations between the states of Serbia and Montenegro," said Yugoslav President Vojislav Kostunica. "This step means a break with the previous regime" of Milosevic, currently on trial before a U.N. tribunal for war crimes in Kosovo, Croatia and Bosnia.

Yugoslavia — whose name has become a synonym for the worst carnage in Europe since World War II — began to unravel along ethnic lines during Milosevic's reign. Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina all declared their independence by 1992, opposing his hard-line nationalist policies.

Serbia and Montenegro stayed together, but their alliance began to crumble in 1997 when Montenegro's president, Milo Djukanovic, distanced himself from Milosevic and started advocating independence for his republic, which was dominated by Serbia in the federation.

David and Goliath



Nasser Nasser/Associated Press

Palestinian boys throw stones toward an Israeli army tank positioned in the entrance of al Amari refugee camp, in the West Bank town of Ramallah Thursday.

Montenegro, a territory just larger than Connecticut, has a population of 650,000, compared to nearly 10 million in Serbia, a republic about the size of Indiana.

The United States and the EU had opposed Montenegrin secession, fearing a breakup would encourage other independence-minded groups in the region — in particular, ethnic Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia and Serbs in Bosnia.

"This is an important day and a step

toward the stability in the region and in Europe," said EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana, who mediated the accord. "This is not the end of anything, but a beginning of a new chapter that will bring you closer to the European Union."

Kostunica and Djukanovic will meet Friday with the EU leaders on the opening day of a two-day summit in Barcelona to celebrate the deal that capped months of difficult negotiations.

United States envoy arrives in bloody Middle East

BY COLLEEN BARRY
Associated Press Writer

JERUSALEM — U.S. envoy Anthony Zinni launched his third Mideast truce mission on Thursday, arriving during the bloodiest period in 18 months of fighting to try to achieve an elusive cease-fire.

After Zinni met Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in Jerusalem, Israeli troops began withdrawing from the West Bank town of Ramallah. Witnesses said the tanks were leaving from all directions, and Israeli military sources confirmed that a pullout had begun.

Israelis and Palestinians said they are ready to work with the U.S. envoy, but violence persisted. Israeli forces killed five armed Palestinians in gunbattles and two militiamen in a helicopter attack in Gaza, while Palestinian militants set off a bomb under an Israeli tank, killing three soldiers.

Each side warned it would continue fighting if the other did not end the violence.

Beginning his peace mission against the backdrop of Israel's largest military operation since the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, Zinni met with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon Thursday night.

"My main effort now is to achieve a cease-fire," Sharon told reporters before the meeting at his Jerusalem residence, across the street from a cafe where a suicide bomber killed 11 people last Saturday.

Palestinian officials said Zinni was to meet with Arafat on Saturday.

As Zinni arrived, Israeli Defense Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer ordered a gradual pullback of troops from Ramallah, the Palestinian commercial center in the West Bank that has been occupied by dozens of Israeli tanks since Tuesday.

But the Bush administration said that was not enough.

"We do expect a complete withdrawal from Palestinian-controlled areas, including Ramallah, and the other areas the Israel Defense Force recently entered," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said. He

also called on Arafat "to do more to stop the groups that carry out violence."

Britain's Foreign Office also contacted Israel's government and urged it to pull out of Ramallah, saying Israel should take "immediate steps to de-escalate" its operations.

The Israeli army chief of staff has said 20,000 soldiers have been deployed in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in response to a string of attacks on Israelis by Palestinians.

In all, 174 people have been killed on the Palestinian side and 62 people have been killed on the Israeli side since the beginning of March.

Israeli tanks also seized neighborhoods in Bethlehem, entering the city from all directions in the early morning hours Thursday. Some tanks were parked 300 yards from the Church of the Nativity, traditional site of the birth of Jesus.

Arafat, meanwhile, said he remained "completely committed" to reaching a peace agreement with Israel, but accused Sharon of abandoning previous accords.

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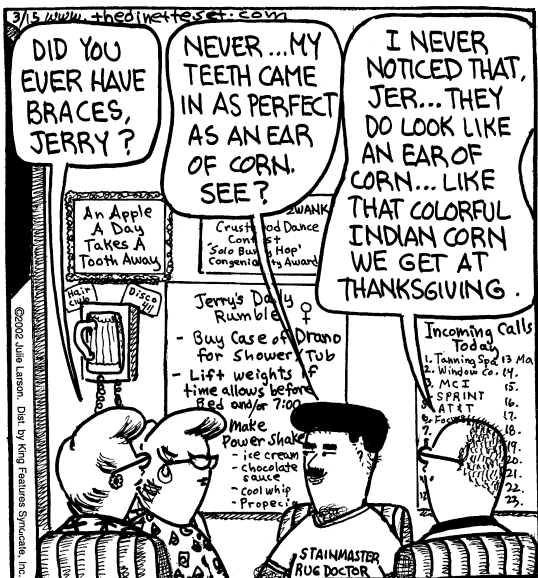
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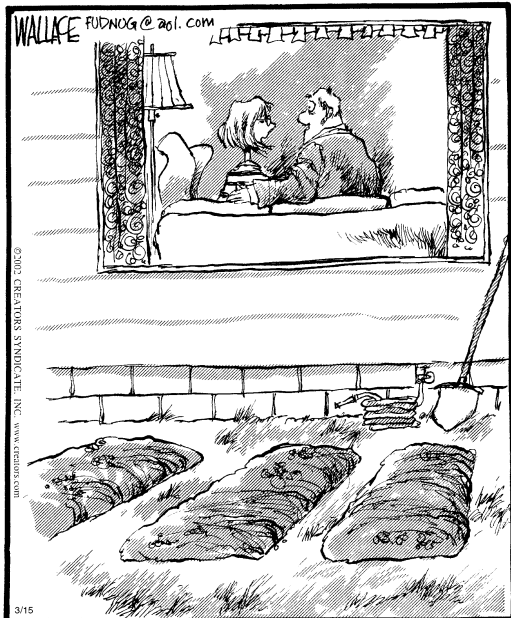
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COMICS

The Dinette Set by Julie Larson



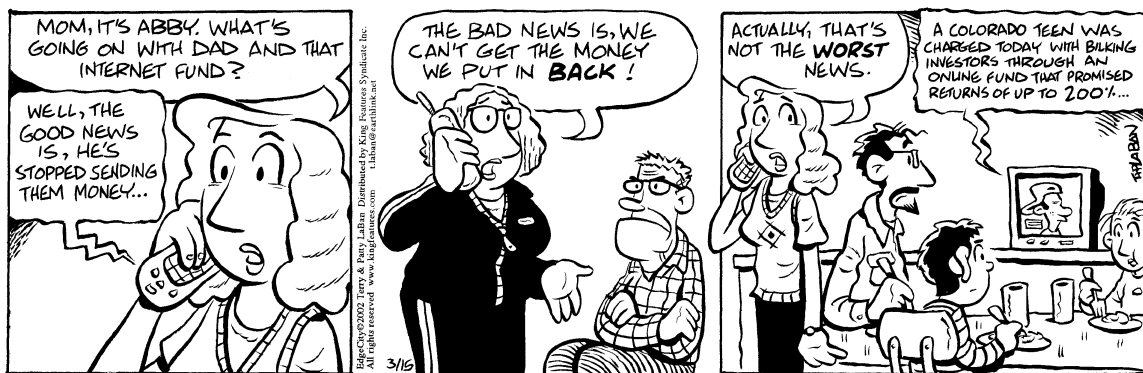
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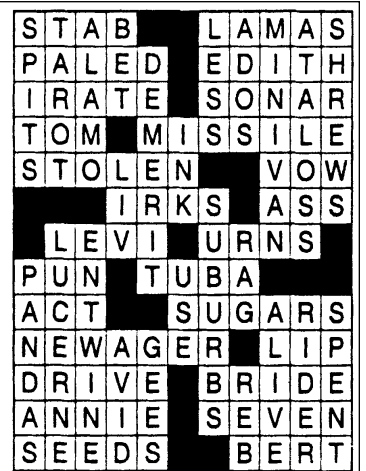


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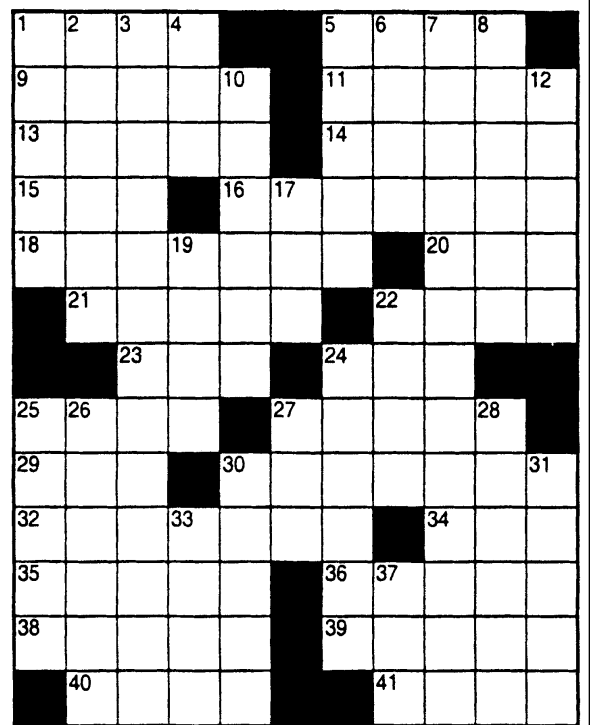


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 - 31 Zellweger of "Nurse Betty"
 - 33 Highway exit
 - 37 Money machine



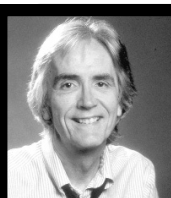
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NEWS OF THE WEIRD

by Chuck Shepard

Medical examiner goes to extremes so not be second guessed

Among the 39 charges leveled by the Tennessee Health Department against former state medical examiner Dr. Charles Harlan in December were that he deliberately mutilated bodies during autopsies so that "no one (could) second-guess me"; vastly over-used "sudden infant death syndrome" as the cause of death for babies; and let animals "freely in his facility and consume the organs of deceased persons."

FUNNY PAPERZ

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