FREE

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Santa Monica Daily Press

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How to win in small claims court

Most winners do their homework and come to court prepared

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON
Daily Press Staff Writer

Word to the aggrieved, downtrodden and betrayed: Make sure you do your homework before going to small claims court.

Most Santa Monica judge pro tems will tell you that when the time comes for your day in court, you'll only have a few minutes to prove your case. So you had better be prepared.

Hazel Williams Carter, co-owner of Maxx Salon, learned that last month after she and her business partners tried to collect money from former employee Bethanna Meneley. But pro tem judge Linda Wisotsky said the former massage therapist didn't owe money to the salon even though it advertised Meneley's services before she quit and the ad material was circulated.

Wisotsky also shot down Kimberly Valnes' claim that she was owed money from boutique owner Rose Victorian after she tried to return merchandise. She couldn't prove that there was a sign in the store that said all sales were final.

Pro tem judge Caroline Welch said often litigants in the small claims courtroom are emotional and don't base their claims on substantial evidence.

Such was the case for Michael Ryan who claimed last week that his former landlord-roommate cost him to lose his job and didn't give him enough time to vacate the apartment. Welch found no evidence to support his claims and denied the judgment.

"A lot of times people have all sorts of history with each other and they think they have a forum to vent," she said. "You have to make sure you have your ducks in a row."

To show just how emotional it can get, often times judges will tell litigants that they will take the "case under submission" and send the ruling in the mail just to avoid confrontation in the courtroom. Still, some judges will rule on the spot, but a bailiff from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Office is always present.

It seems citizens have been emboldened by television shows like "People's Court" and "Judge Judy," as the Santa Monica Small Claims docket is chock full four days a week.

"It's a slice of life," said Judge Welch. "It is interesting, that is why there is five TV shows about it."

Close to 30 people head to Santa Monica Small Claims Court each week to file their beefs.

If the complaint is for anything up to $5,000, it can be heard under small claims rules. Litigants represent themselves to the judge and it's the only courtroom where lawyers aren't allowed.

But basic rules of law still govern. Each case is decided not on "reasonable doubt" but on "preponderance," which relies on who has the most convincing evidence.

"Some people think it's small claims and it's informal so they aren't prepared," said pro tem judge Richard Bloom, who is a lawyer practicing family law and is a Santa Monica City councilman. "You don't get a lot of time so you have to use that

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TIPS TO HELP YOUR CASE

• Sit down and write a clear and concise statement. Once you have done that, the exact controversy will probably become clearer to you and you won't forget crucial information.

• Do your homework to clearly establish the dollar amount of your damages. Picking a number out of thin air, particularly for emotional distress won't convince a judge of anything except that you're emotionally distressed.

• Document damages, find comparable cases and bring in witnesses. You will need originals or copies of all relevant documentation such as receipts, contracts and canceled checks. You may want to prove damages by bringing the damaged item to court, showing photographs of the item before and after the damage occurred, or submitting the report of a repair person. The best evidence you have is a damaged good.

• Make sure you are suing the right person. Write the exact name and home or business address of the defendant. The

See TIPS, page 3

A grande opening



Andrew H. Fixmer/ Daily Press

Daniel Vasquez, a Santa Monica resident, works the grill Tuesday at the grand opening of the new La Salsa restaurant on Colorado Boulevard between 20th Street and Centinela Avenue. Customers were given a free meal with the purchase of a soda and the opportunity to make a donation to the Westside Foodbank, which raised roughly $1,000 during the restaurant's opening day.

UCLA seminar will focus on economic impact of studios on Los Angeles

BY CHRIS YOUNG
Special to the Daily Press

An upcoming conference at UCLA will discuss the status and future of the entertainment industry in Los Angeles and the implications for the city's economy.

At the conference — which goes from 9:15 a.m. to 3 p.m. on March 27 — the UCLA Anderson School of Management will hold its quarterly economic forecast for the nation, the state, and for the first time, the Los Angeles region, with a breakdown of Southern California counties.

According to the school, Los Angeles lost 12 percent of its jobs in the movie industry last year, causing more economic problems than the aftermath of Sept. 11. The impact of the unemployment will be debated in a panel setting.

Another panel will focus on industry trends, their effects, and possible results. Some topics are technological improvements to film and music distribution, consolidation of media companies, and globalization.

Keynote speakers include Los Angeles Mayor Jim Hahn and Jeff Berg, chairman and CEO of International

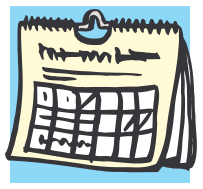
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Santa Monica's Daily Calendar



Get Out!

Puppetolio! hosted by Santa Monica Puppet & Magic Center will be held today at 1:00 p.m. Shows are always followed by a demonstration, Q & A, and a tour of the Puppet Museum and workshop. The program is for all ages, 3 and up. All seats: $6.50. The Center is located at 1255 2nd Street in Santa Monica, adjacent to the Third Street Promenade. Reservations/Information: (310) 656-0483 or www.puppetmagic.com.

Get your Learn on!

Managing Your Money Learn tips for sound money management at this FREE program sponsored by UCLA Healthcare's 50-Plus Program. 10 a.m. - 11:30 a.m., Marisa Leif Conference Room, third floor, 300 UCLS Medical Plaza on the Westwood campus. For reservations and directions, call (800) 516-5323.

Shiatsu Massage School of California is hosting Kung Fu classes for advanced students from 4:15 to 5:15 every Wednesday. Suggested donation per class is $4.00. Free class for first-time visitors. Instructed by: Master Luu Truong. 2309 Main St., (310) 396-4877.

Santa Monica-UCLA Medical Center will have a certified lactation specialist to teach all aspects of breast-feeding tonight at 1245 16th St., MOB Classroom, from 6:30 p.m. - 9 p.m. Cost is $50.00. Call (310) 319-4947 for reservations or more information.

UCLA Neuropsychiatric Institute psychiatrists Thomas Newton and Roger Donovick will discuss new trends in substance abuse and the latest available treatments at this FREE health lecture hosted by UCLA Healthcare. 7 p.m. 8:30 p.m., Marisa Leif Conference Room, third floor, 300 UCLA Medical Plaza on the Westwood campus. Info:

(310)516-5323.

Big Event!

Big Wheels Deliver Meals will be held from 10:30 a.m. To 1 p.m. At the Meals on Wheels West office in Santa Monica today. 609 Arizona Ave. Meals on Wheels West invites the community to join them by participating and donating your time or resources. For more information call (310) 394-7558 or (310) 394-5133.



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JACQUELINE BIGAR'S STARS

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

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

ARIES (March 21-April 19)
★★★★★ Your togetherness makes waves and establishes your place within a set circle. Others listen; after all, you're so reasonable. You are able to easily establish precedent right now. Others follow your lead and thinking. You know what you're doing. Tonight: Just don't be alone.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
★★★★ Your actions make a difference. You tend to do the right thing and choose the correct words. Whether you throw a dart with your left or right hand makes no difference: You'll hit the bull's-eye. Check around to see if you are getting the best rates possible on your bank accounts. Tonight: Treat a friend to dinner.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20)
★★★★★ Intuition adds to your decisions, getting the deal or convincing an important someone in your life of the rightness of your actions or thoughts. Others admire your personality and wish they had the same gifts you do. Be thankful for your insight. Tonight: Whatever makes you content.

CANCER (June 21-July 22)
★★★ Do your homework, which involves seeking out experts and doing your own personal fact-finding. Networking also provides many options in your life that you perhaps haven't looked at. A friend makes an offer that's too good to be true. Tonight: Take some time for yourself.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)
★★★★★ You zero in on the basic principles with ease. Think about your bottom line in a discussion with a partner. This person cares deeply and gives you the best advice possible. Throw the topic of vacation out on the table. You could be surprised at the suggestions. Tonight: Ask someone out.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)
★★★★ You're in the limelight, and others cheer you on. Understand your limits when dealing with someone who sometimes states his or her opinion a bit too clearly for your own taste. This person could sabotage you. Take charge and follow through on your desires. Tonight: A must appearance.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)
★★★★★ Carefully reach out for someone. Look behind the words to see what is really going on with someone. Deal with another directly. Consider other opinions concerning your finances and spending. You will find even better ideas and solutions. Tonight: Togetherness works.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)
★★★★★ A partner does everything he or she can to make your load lighter. Carefully consider your options, especially those involving finances. This person might not be as creative as you, but he or she is more than willing to help out with your ideas. Tonight: Be a friend first.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)
★★★★★ If you let others approach you, you will remain more in control and be able to pick and choose your options. Make sure your work is up to snuff. You don't want a problem at the last minute. Details count. Tonight: Accept an invitation.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)
★★★★ You might not be able to center on what you want. You can clear out a lot of work, though, if you just start doing it. Not everything has to have a rhyme or reason. Discussions shed new light on a careless associate. Tonight: Proceed with care.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)
★★★★★ Realize that your imagination knows no limit, but others might have difficulty following your rationale or thinking. Go with creative and dynamic ideas, but slow down enough so that others can understand. Don't promote confusion. Tonight: You feel your Wheaties.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)
★★★★ Your personality melts barriers, and you come up with solutions for both family and friends. You understand what ails another and quickly take action. Others count on your actions and leadership. Take it slowly with a friend. Tonight: Order in.

QUOTE of the DAY

"I consider exercise vulgar. It makes people smell."
— Alec Yuill Thornton

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Collecting on your small claims judgment isn't money in the bank

CLAIMS, from page 1

time efficiently and can't just go in there and say whatever you want."

But just because you win your case doesn't mean you'll collect your money. It's still up to the individual to collect the judgment.

"A deadbeat is still a deadbeat," Bloom said. "That can be an issue even if you have a million dollar judgment."

But judgments do end up on a person's credit report — whether the judgment is for the plaintiff or the defendant.

That's what web designer Allen Compton is banking on. Compton won a $5,050 judgment last month against Voxicom, a Santa Monica-based automated voice mail and e-mail system provider.

The financially-strapped company only paid Compton half the bill for setting up the company's web site.

"It's not clear if Voxicom will pay," Compton said. "There is not a whole lot I can do as an individual so we'll just see if Voxicom will do the right thing."

Compton said the judgment may help him when the creditors come knocking on Voxicom's door.

"It gives it more teeth when there is a judgment," he said. "Otherwise, I'm the little guy over there yelling."

When Wendy Patterson won her $400 judgment against a repairman for a faulty garbage disposal last week, she asked Judge Welch, "How do I collect the money?"

The only words of wisdom Welch could give the plaintiff was "This is just your first victory."

TIPS, from page 1

name of the person or business must be complete and correct. If the defendant does business under a trade name, you'll need to know it's legal name. To obtain the real name, go to the county clerk in the borough where the business is conducted.

• Don't assume the judge will understand that you are clearly on the side of righteousness. Usually it's unclear to someone who is hearing the case for the first time.

• Stay calm and stick to the facts.

• Make your case simple, methodical, easy to understand and unemotional.

• Make sure you follow proper procedure by filing all the necessary paperwork and serving the parties correctly. The clerks at Santa Monica Small Claims Court are very helpful, but they can't do your work for you and won't give you legal advice.

HOW TO COLLECT A JUDGMENT

• Don't rush it. Don't be in a hurry to start bugging the defendant to pay up. Most small claims courts allow a losing defendant to appeal, so wait until the appeal deadline (30 days) passes before asking for money. Otherwise, your pushing your may nudge the defendant into filing an appeal, which you may lose.

• Don't forget to ask. A surprising number of debtors will pay once a judgment is issued, if you politely ask for the money. A written request that reminds the debtor that an unpaid judgment will probably show up in the debtor's credit file also helps.

• Treat the judgment as a long-term investment. Every state authorizes you to collect interest, commonly between 8-12 percent, on a judgment. Viewed as a long-term, uninsured investment, court judgments can pay off big time. Compared to limited partnerships, start-up companies and even many stocks, a court judgment has relatively low risk and moderate performance.

• Think through your collection strategy. Your strategy must depend on the debtor's assets and income and the cost of collection methods available. You can get assistance of a sheriff or city marshal located in the county where the defendant works. You must provide the official with the information needed to locate assets (money or property) of the defendant and the sheriff or marshal can then seize those assets to satisfy your judgment. The official may request mileage and other fees before he or she seizes the assets. In many cases, those fees can be aadded to the original judgment amount, which covers the cost of preparing and sending a summons by certified mail to the defendant.

• Do your homework. The more you know about the business or person who owes you money, the more likely you are to get paid. Be a private detective and keep tabs on the debtor's assets, lifestyle and projected financial situation.

• Know when to call it quits. Don't throw good money after bad. Keep a sharp eye on how much you are spending to try to collect — you may not get it back.

Entertainment industry a small part of Santa Monica's economy

UCLA, from page 1

Creative Management. Industry experts also will speak.

Attendees won't receive a separate forecast for Santa Monica because it is difficult to get detailed information on a city-by-city basis, said Tom Lieser of the Anderson Forecast team. The annual Santa Monica Economic Forecast, researched by economists at Cal State Long Beach, does focus on the city but doesn't analyze the entertainment industry separately.

Jobs in the entertainment industry accounted for 5 percent of the city's total employment in 2000.

"Santa Monica's economy is quite diverse, with business and financial services, retailing and visitor services representing much of the job force," Lieser said.

Joseph Magaddino, chairman and professor of economics at CSLB, said there were 4,000 entertainment industry jobs in Santa Monica out of 75,000 total in 2000, a sizable but not dominant group.

Two main factors have influenced the economic outlook of the entertainment industry. The collective bargaining in 2001 impacted the television industry because of layoffs and changing production timing. Also, productions outside of the U.S. to save costs have negatively affected the film industry, Lieser said.

Economic development researchers get statistics from local, state and federal governments on the entertainment industry such as employment reports, production and sales data, and income data.

Other information comes from proprietary sources like Variety, Billboard, and advertising.

The forecast can't gather information on the self-employed because they can't be tracked. There are more self-employed people in the entertainment industry than other industries.

A day in the sun



Andrew H Fixmer/Daily Press

Charissa Thompson and Brian Fitzpatrick take an afternoon to soak up some sun at their 11th Street home Tuesday.

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STATE

CALIFORNIA BRIEFS

FBI seizes tons of drugs in nationwide crackdown

By The Associated Press

DOWNEY — FBI agents seized 3 1/2 tons of marijuana and arrested 12 people around the nation Tuesday as they cracked a ring that smuggled the drug from Mexico and used a shipping company to distribute it, authorities said.

The marijuana was seized from several "stash houses" in the Los Angeles area, most of it from the garage of a home in suburban Downey, said Cheryl Mimura, a spokeswoman for the FBI's Los Angeles bureau.

Nearly two dozen locations around the nation were searched. Most arrests were made in Southern California but one person was taken into custody in Indiana, Mimura said.

Federal indictments were filed against 17 people. Three were fugitives and two already had been arrested on unrelated state drug charges, Mimura said.

Altogether, more than 10 tons of marijuana, 90 pounds of cocaine and more than $1 million in suspected drug earnings were seized during an investigation dubbed "Operation Jaguar."

The investigation was sparked in July 2000 when a shipping firm in Indianapolis reported receiving several suspicious boxes. They turned out to contain drugs, Mimura said.

Labels on the boxes showed that they came from a Los Angeles-area shipping firm, Mimura said.

The drugs then were sent to New York, Miami and Nashville for distribution by local couriers, Mimura said.

It was unclear how long the ring had been operating or how many tons of marijuana they had shipped, she added.

Olympic gold medalist pleads innocent to drug charge

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Olympic gold medal runner Jon Drummond pleaded innocent Tuesday to a charge that he transported seven pounds of marijuana last year.

Drummond, 33, a member of the U.S. 400-meter relay team that won a gold medal during the Sydney Games, is scheduled for a preliminary hearing on the felony count April 17. He remains free on $20,000 bail.

Members of an anti-drug task force arrested Drummond Oct. 23 as he was leaving Los Angeles International Airport with a backpack containing the marijuana. Defense attorney Victor Sherman has said Drummond had no idea what was inside the backpack he picked up.

The relay team of Drummond, Maurice Greene, Bernard Williams and Brian Lewis were criticized at the 2000 Olympics when they preened and flexed their muscles during a victory lap and on the victory stand.

When they received their medals, the foursome clowned during the national anthem. Drummond later apologized.

Their conduct led USA Track & Field, the sport's domestic governing body, to begin drafting guidelines for behavior on the victory stand.

The USATF also ordered the four runners to speak to youngsters about what happened and the need to take responsibility for one's actions.

Father charged in murder of five children pleads innocent

By The Associated Press

WHITTIER — A man accused of asphyxiating five of his children by lighting a charcoal grill in his home pleaded innocent Tuesday to murder and attempted murder charges.

Adair Javier Garcia, 30, stood in a glass cage wearing a pale yellow jumpsuit as his attorney, Patricia Mulligan, entered the pleas. Superior Court Commissioner Gerald N. Mansfield ordered the courtroom audience to the far side of the courtroom before Garcia was led into the security cage.

Garcia, of Pico Rivera, remains in custody without bail on murder charges that make him eligible for the death penalty. Prosecutors will not decide whether to pursue the death penalty until sometime after a preliminary hearing set for April 15.

Garcia, a telephone company technician, was charged Feb. 25 with murdering five of his children and attempting to murder another on Feb. 19 by using the grill to fill his home with carbon monoxide while they slept.

Garcia is accused of killing Brenda Garcia, 10, and siblings Jonathan, 7; Vanessa, 6; Cecilia, 4; and Anthony, 2.

The only child to survive, 9-year-old Kassandra, was named as the victim in a count of attempted murder with great bodily injury.

Authorities allege Garcia intended to kill the children and himself, and said he and his wife — who was not living in the house at the time of the deaths — were having marital problems.

Prosecutors allege special circumstances of lying in wait, multiple murder and murder by administration of poison. Special circumstances allow the possibility of capital punishment if a defendant is convicted.

STATE

Jury deliberates in San Francisco dog mauling case

BY LINDA DEUTSCH
AP Special Correspondent

LOS ANGELES — A jury began deliberating Tuesday in the trial of two San Francisco attorneys charged in their neighbor's dog mauling death after last-minute courtroom fireworks that led to a defense attorney being publicly rebuked.

"The administration of justice is in your hands," Superior Court Judge James L. Warren told the jury at midmorning.

Deliberations got under way nearly 14 months after college lacrosse coach Diane Whipple, 33, was mauled in the hallway of her San Francisco apartment building. After five hours of talks, the panel went home for the night.

Marjorie Knoller, 46, who was present at the scene, is accused of second-degree murder, involuntary manslaughter and keeping a mischievous dog that killed a person. Her husband, Robert Noel, 60, faces the latter two charges. He was away at the time.

The judge sent the jurors off with a warning that their deliberations might be influenced because it was "a case with so much evidence and emotional content so high."

In the final moments, the judge himself clashed with Knoller's defense attorney over her efforts to interrupt the prosecutor's closing rebuttal argument.

"Take your seat now," the judge told attorney Nedra Ruiz, "and (do) not get up again or your next objection will be made from the holding cell behind you."

Ruiz had been trying to argue that Assistant District Attorney Jim Hammer was misinterpreting a piece of evidence, but the judge said he was entitled to give his own interpretation during closing arguments.

In closing, Hammer criticized Ruiz for accusing Whipple's domestic partner, Sharon Smith, of lying on the witness stand, but he said he would not respond to Ruiz's claim Monday that he was trying to curry favor with San Francisco's homosexual community.

"I am not going to give Ms. Ruiz the dignity of a response to her charge," he said.

Hammer told the jury it was clear the defendants ignored repeated warnings that their huge presa canario dogs, Bane and Hera, were dangerous.

He reminded jurors of more than 30 people who testified about scary encounters with Bane and Hera in the apartment building or neighborhood before Whipple's death.

"What would it take for Mr. Noel — 50? 100?" Hammer asked.

At one point Hammer tried to recreate Whipple's struggle to breathe through her crushed larynx. Whipple's mother, Penny, sobbed quietly in the courtroom.

Outside court, Ruiz said she believed gay community pressure was responsible for charges being filed.

"There was a drumbeat for prosecution in this case by the gay community," she said, adding that for the same reason the defendants were jailed on the "outrageous bail" of $2 million bail each.

"Judge Warren caved in to political pressure," she said.

Hammer said he believed Ruiz was in contempt of court for criticizing the judge publicly while the jury was deliberating.

"It's desperate of Ms. Ruiz to be attacking Judge Warren," he said.

The trial was moved to Los Angeles due to extensive publicity in San Francisco.

Hewlett-Packard chief claims victory in Compaq merger vote

BY BRIAN BERGSTEIN
AP Business Writer

CUPERTINO — Hewlett-Packard chief Carly Fiorina claimed victory Tuesday in the nasty proxy fight over the $20 billion purchase of Compaq Computer Corp. Dissident board member Walter Hewlett insisted the vote remained too close to call.

Fiorina's claim followed a tense, two-hour shareholder meeting in which Fiorina was booed and Hewlett received a standing ovation as they made last-minute appeals over the fate of what would be the computer industry's biggest merger.

Fiorina, who has staked her reputation and perhaps her job on a successful merger, told a news conference that HP's proxy solicitor assured her that shareholders had narrowly approved it.

"We think we have a slim but sufficient margin, and we think it's important to let people know that," she said.

Her claim was disputed by Hewlett, who led a five-month fight against what he considers an ill-advised deal that would weaken the technology stalwart his father co-founded.

"In a proxy contest this close, where stockholders are changing their votes right up until the closing of the polls, it is simply impossible to determine the outcome at this time," he said.

It will take several weeks to determine the official result of what appeared to be the closest corporate election in years. Independent proxy counters must verify each vote, and each side can challenge whether the proper people signed certain ballots.

Compaq shareholders are expected to easily approve the deal Wednesday.

"We are very close to making this merger a reality," said Compaq CEO Michael Capellas, who would be second-in-command at the new HP.

A merger would wed HP, a 64-year-old Silicon Valley icon grounded in digital imaging, with the No. 2 personal computer maker. The deal has already received approval from U.S. and European regulators.

HP and Compaq say the deal is essential for their survival in the consolidating computing industry. They believe that together they can dramatically improve their packages for corporate customers, their slumping personal-computer divisions and save $2.5 billion a year.

Hewlett says HP is paying too much for Compaq, would get bogged down in selling low-margin personal computers and services, and can't afford to risk the complex integration.

The disagreement within HP turned into one of the most intriguing episodes in high-tech history, largely because the company is one of Silicon Valley's marquee institutions and its late founders are still revered as visionary engineers.

Fiorina, who was hired to lead the giant computer and printer maker in 1999 and ordered to shake the company up, is expected to resign if the deal fails.

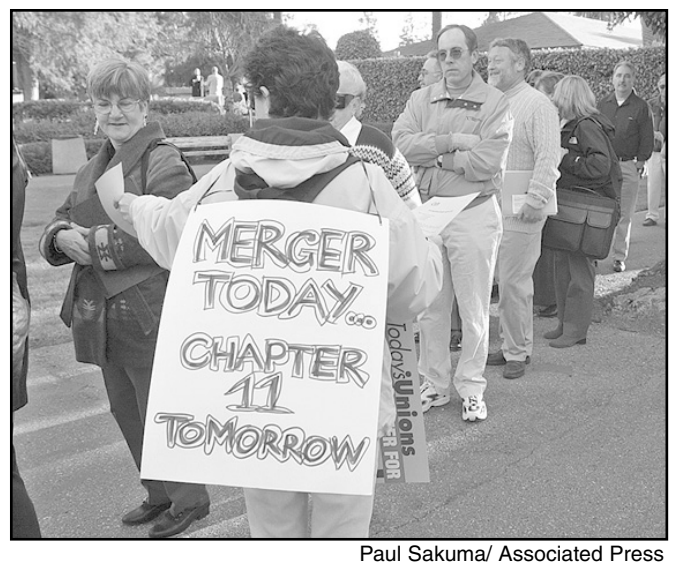
She had to overcome a hostile reaction from Wall Street after the Compaq deal was announced Sept. 3, and then the opposition of Hewlett and Packard family interests with 18 percent of HP stock. Several large pension funds also opposed the deal.

With the stakes so high, HP and Walter Hewlett each spent tens of millions of dollars to deluge HP's 900,000 shareholders with letters, advertisements, telemarketers' phone calls and multiple ballots.

"I feel like I stepped out of my life and into an alternative universe, if you will, but it was definitely a cause that needed to be taken up," Hewlett said after Tuesday's meeting.

Most investors mailed in their votes before the meeting, but many began lining up at dawn outside a Cupertino auditorium to cast ballots in person and watch Fiorina field questions.

Mike Beman, 24, of nearby Los Altos opposed the deal and came to the meeting to be part of Silicon Valley history.



Paul Sakuma/ Associated Press

Bizouard, a demonstrator who works at Compaq in France, passes out a flier as she protests at the Hewlett Packard Company shareholders meeting in Cupertino, Calif. on Tuesday. The proxy fight over the $21 billion acquisition of Compaq Computer Corp. by HP gave individual investors a rare chance to directly influence the fate of two companies.

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NATIONAL

Philadelphia woman poses as heiress, scams business

BY MICHAEL RUBINKAM
Associated Press Writer

PHILADELPHIA — Heiress, socialite, physician, arts benefactor — Tereza Solomon Demoody seemingly had it all.

She lived in the penthouse suite of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, cruised around town in a limousine and claimed Revolutionary War hero Haym Salomon as an ancestor.

So when Demoody asked a prominent real estate broker named Harvey Sklaroff for two personal loans totaling $80,000 — and promised to repay the money within days, with 25 percent interest — it seemed a safe bet to Sklaroff.

It wasn't.

Authorities say Demoody, 48, had constructed an elaborate ruse. She wasn't an heiress or a doctor or an arts benefactor, they say, but a middle-class widow who had exhausted her life insurance money and wanted more. Authorities say Demoody had no intention of making good on the loan.

Demoody, arrested March 1 at her modest Philadelphia rowhouse and charged with theft, was arraigned in a full-length mink coat.

"Usually, when someone is assuming an identity, they assume it on paper only. But she had some kind of need to play dress-up," said Laurel Grass, chief of the fraud unit at the Montgomery County district attorney's office.

Demoody denied all charges in a telephone interview, saying: "The legal question is, 'Did I rip anybody off?' No." She also denied ever claiming to be an heiress or physician, although she said she is an "N.D.," a doctor of naturopathy. Naturopaths use natural substances and therapies to treat disease instead of drugs.

Sklaroff says he just wants his money back. So do a number of others who claim to have been tricked. Demoody allegedly owes $32,000 to her limousine driver and $52,000 to the Ritz-Carlton, where she stayed in a $3,500-per-night suite.

Demoody has run into financial trouble many times over the past 15 years, fending off creditors' lawsuits and declaring bankruptcy at least twice, court records indicate.

Sklaroff, 52, said Demoody was a supremely talented actress.

"This was brilliant. She knew exactly what she was doing. It was a very smooth, well-calculated scheme to take money that didn't belong to her," he said.

Demoody's husband, David Demoody, died two years ago. According to prosecutors, she received a $120,000 life insurance payout, but the account was drained in little more than three months.

Demoody evidently used some of the money on limousine rides, hiring driver Art Skill in December 2000.

Skill said Demoody told him she was heiress to the $47 million family fortune — a fortune amassed by Haym Salomon, a Polish-born Jew who helped bankroll the American Revolution. Skill didn't know it at the time, but Salomon died penniless.

"I never used the word heiress," Demoody said. "I said descendant."

Skill, 55, said Demoody's checks to him had bounced and he was unable to pay his bills. The bank repossessed his 14-seat passenger van.

"I thought we became friends, and she was just a farce," he said.

Demoody said her financial troubles started when a relative failed to repay a large loan on time, causing her to bounce some checks. But she said she has since made good on most of them.

Demoody has been charged with theft, receiving stolen property and writing bad checks. Police said a total of $450,000 in checks were written out of Demoody's closed life insurance account. Prosecutors are looking for more alleged victims.

"I felt sorry for her, foolishly," Sklaroff said. "It was a perfect illusion."

Recruiting efforts target men to help solve nursing shortage

BY JEFF LINKOUS
Associated Press Writer

TRENTON, N.J. — Recruiting efforts aimed at boosting the thinning ranks of registered nurses are targeting a nearly untapped labor pool: men.

A campaign kicked off last month by New Brunswick-based Johnson & Johnson features men in nearly half its advertising, and 21 of the 68 nurses profiled on the health care giant's promotional Web site are men.

Men make up about 6 percent of the 2.7 million nurses in the United States, and a nationwide poll found only one in 10 men considers it a career choice.

There are an estimated 126,000 vacant full-time nursing positions at hospitals across the country. That number is forecast to triple by 2020.

"If you exclude men from recruiting, then you reduce half the potential population to recruit from," said Johnson & Johnson spokesman John McKeegan.

Johnson & Johnson's program includes recruitment posters, brochures and videos to be placed in 25,000 high schools and 1,500 nursing schools and organizations. The Web site features a searchable database of scholarships and nursing programs in the country.

"If men realized what they're getting into, they would see this with much more optimism. There are so many opportunities that could unfold: business, management, clinical specialties," said Peter Buerhaus, senior associate dean for research at Vanderbilt University's School of Nursing in Nashville.

Michael Desjardins, a 33-year-old registered nurse who attends the University of Utah in Salt Lake City and is president of the National Student Nurse Association, said: "I make $23 an hour. That's a great salary. I'm still working on my undergraduate degree and I can support my wife and baby."

Kevin McDonald, 24, a nurse in the cardiac surgical intensive care unit at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, said nursing duties are varied and put a lot of powerful technology in the hands of those on the job.

"So many advances in the medical field have made the job more complex but strengthened it as a profession," he said.

NATIONAL

Plagiarism case continues to haunt Kansas school

BY JOSH FREED
Associated Press Writer

PIPER, Kan. — On the bulletin board outside the office of Piper High School principal Mike Adams, newspaper clippings herald the school's athletic success and student achievements.

But one story is conspicuously missing: The plagiarism scandal that has produced national headlines, infuriated parents, alienated teachers and divided the town.

That story may be absent from Adams' bulletin board, but it's not going away.

Ever since the school board overturned former teacher Christine Pelton's failing grade for 28 students, Piper students have been booed at competing schools, some teachers have made plans to quit and the administration is in upheaval.

"Our kids are getting labeled unfairly, and our parents are all being given the same stereotype," said English teacher Leona Sigwing. "It's gone beyond the plagiarism issue to something that's hurting students, and the community."

The controversy began last year when Pelton, a biology teacher, gave zeros to 28 students she accused of plagiarizing a botany project from the Internet.

Pelton said she suspected plagiarism because some reports contained identical material. The school board overruled her decision on the grades in December.

But the turmoil didn't end there.

Sigwing leads a special teacher's union committee formed to deal with the controversy and already one of her blue folders is thick with accounts of the slights suffered by students or parents:

At out-of-town basketball games last month, Piper students were greeted with a sign that read "plagiarists," and a few students wore T-shirts that called them cheaters, Sigwing said. Some complain crowds at games have chanted "Cheaters! Cheaters!"

A college-educated woman who graduated from Piper six years ago recounted that she was told by a potential employer at a job interview, "You didn't get any kind of education, did you?"

Pelton quit immediately after the board's decision. Adams and the school's assistant principal also said they plan to leave. Another teacher has quit, citing the dispute, and union officials say other teachers are waiting until a May 15 deadline to decide whether to stay or go.

In addition, one parent is trying to have the school board recalled. Some employees talk openly of how the superintendent and school board ought to resign.

The cheating questions prompted all 12 deans of Kansas State University to lecture school board members in a letter that said, "we will expect Piper students ... to buy into (the university's honor code) as part of our culture."

The letter seemed to be a "veiled threat that our kids would be scrutinized more closely than other kids because they came from Piper," said parent Dean Katerndahl.

The school board offered teachers an olive branch on Friday. Sigwing said board members wrote an open letter to teachers asking them to stay, "so that we can emerge as a better, stronger, more respected district."

Although board members still have not explained why they apparently ordered Pelton to change the grades, they said in their letter that they want to "prevent a repeat of this situation."

Sigwing said the letter is an indication that the board is willing to repair its relationship with teachers.

Board members also have to repair their relationship with law enforcement. Wyandotte County District Attorney Nick Tomasic has filed a civil petition against the board, alleging that it violated open meetings laws when it met in secret to apparently force Pelton to change her grades. On Friday, Tomasic said he expects to negotiate a settlement with board members without filing criminal charges.

Katerndahl, whose son was in Pelton's biology class but was not accused of plagiarizing, has started a parents group that hopes to reconcile the differences between teachers, parents, and administrators.

Catholic priest accused in abuse lawsuit still working

BY STEPHANIE GASKELL
Associated Press Writer

NEW YORK — A priest placed on leave after allegedly molesting a boy at a parish in 1997 is working at another church — a disclosure Tuesday that came amid calls for New York's Catholic leaders to report abuse involving clerics.

The priest, the Rev. Henry Mills, is accused in a lawsuit of giving then-17-year-old Luis Guzman alcohol and engaging in sex acts during "counseling" sessions from 1992 to 1995. Guzman is seeking more than $100 million in damages.

Mills, who denies the accusations, is currently assigned to St. Elizabeth Church in Manhattan, where he celebrates Mass but does not teach at the parish school, said Monsignor Gerald Walsh, the church's pastor.

Mills was placed on leave from the Bronx parish after the lawsuit was filed and underwent counseling. The Official Catholic Directory for 2002 still lists him as "absent on leave."

Mills' lawyer, Joseph A. Marra, called the abuse allegations "nothing more than a grab and a play for money." Mills has countersued for defamation of character and emotional distress, Marra said.

Cardinal Edward Egan, head of the New York archdiocese, would not comment on the case, said his spokesman, Joseph Zwilling.

Disclosure of Mills' current duties, first reported by the New York Post, came as the city's Catholic church leaders face mounting pressure to change the way they handle abuse allegations.

In a policy change announced last week, the New York archdiocese said future abuse allegations will be forwarded to authorities if church leaders find probable cause and if the alleged victim consents.

But Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau said Tuesday that church leaders have a duty to immediately report any suspected cases of abuse.

Western, Eastern, Northern and Southern Wear



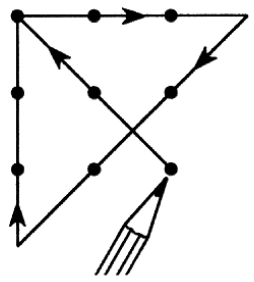
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A STEP AHEAD OF THE INDUSTRY

INTERNATIONAL

Arafat agrees to attend Arab summit in attempt for truce

BY STEVE WEIZMAN
Associated Press Writer

JERUSALEM — Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said Tuesday that Yasser Arafat will be free to travel to an Arab summit next week if the Palestinian leader agrees to a cease-fire, but hinted Arafat may not be allowed back if the violence persists while he is gone.

In another incentive for a truce, Vice President Dick Cheney said he would meet Arafat if it is achieved. It would be Arafat's highest-level contact with the Bush administration.

Both sides said a truce to halt 18 months of Palestinian-Israeli violence could be declared after a crucial meeting of security commanders set for Wednesday. Violence continued Tuesday, with an Israeli soldier and two Palestinians dying in a gunbattle and a Palestinian civilian shot to death by Israel troops.

In a statement late Tuesday, the Palestinian Cabinet said it is prepared to implement a cease-fire "according to a time table agreed on by both sides, without any delay." The statement complained that "troops are still surrounding the Palestinian territories with a tight siege and continuous aggression against the Palestinian people."

Cheney, ending a 24-hour stop in Israel, said he expected Arafat to take decisive steps to end Palestinian attacks on Israelis by week's end.

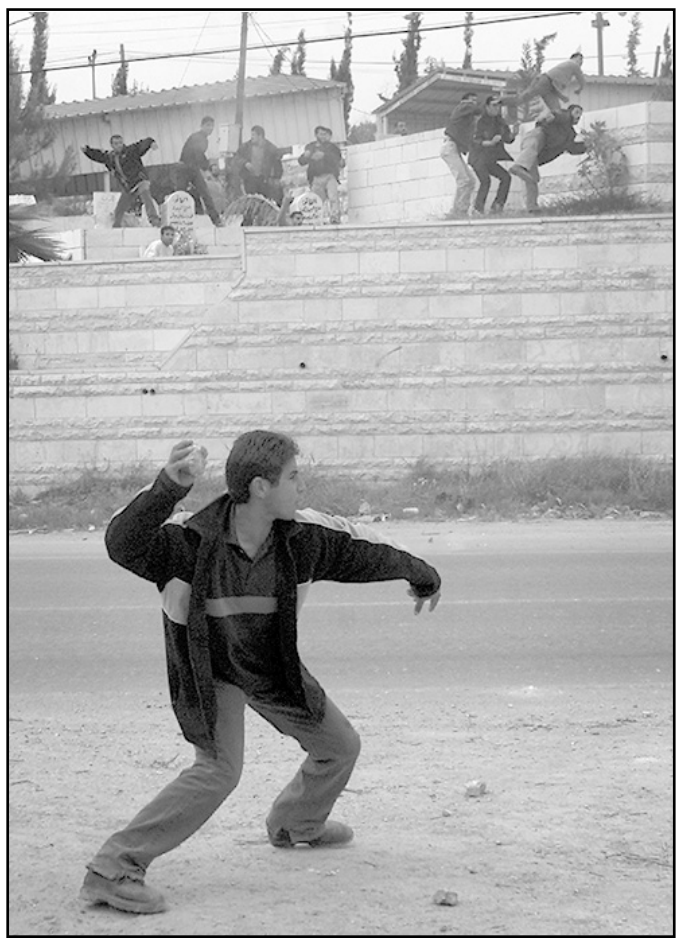
"I cannot emphasize enough how important it will be this week for Chairman Arafat to take the steps to get the cease-fire started," Cheney said at a news conference with Sharon.

Arafat wants to attend a March 27-28 Arab summit in Beirut, at which Saudi Arabia is expected to present a proposal for broad Arab-Israeli peace in exchange for a return of the territories Israel occupied in 1967 — the West Bank, Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem.

These ideas have been welcomed by the United States and European Union, but Sharon opposes a total withdrawal from territory he considers strategically valuable.

Sharon expressed his expectations of Arafat at the summit and added an implied warning.

"We would expect that he will speak on the importance of peace and regional stability," Sharon said.



Jerome Delay/ Associated Press

Palestinian mourners pelt passing vehicles with stones in the West bank village of Beit Omar, near Hebron, Tuesday. Clashes erupted during the funeral procession for Amjad Alama, prompting Israeli forces backed by an armored personnel carrier to enter the village.

Asked whether Arafat would be allowed to return to the Palestinian territories after the summit, Sharon said: "If it turns out that he didn't act in that way, the Cabinet will meet and will have to make a decision. I wouldn't rule out any possibilities."

Palestinian Cabinet Minister Saeb Erekat denounced the comments, saying, "Sharon cannot put an obstacle on the movement of Arafat and cannot dictate to us what we should say or not say," he said.

The U.S. mediation effort, led by envoy Anthony Zinni, focuses on the mechanics of implementing a truce worked out last year by CIA director George Tenet. The plan has in principle been adopted by both sides, but implementation has been scuttled by violence.

Carrying out its terms would be difficult for the Palestinian Authority both logistically — it would have to collect enormous amounts of illegal arms now in the hands of Palestinian militant groups — and politically, in effect ending the Palestinian uprising with little to show for the people's suffering.

Cheney listed the steps he expected Arafat to take: "To speak to his own people personally about the importance of ending violence and terrorism, to issue clear instructions to his security services to enforce the cease-fire and to follow up closely these efforts to ensure implementation of the work plan."

If that occurs, Cheney said, he would be ready to meet Arafat "in the period ahead, at a site in the region to be determined."

Palestinian officials had been angered over Cheney's refusal to meet Arafat during his visit here, saying it showed bias against their side. Erekat welcomed Cheney's promise to meet with the Palestinian leader if the truce comes through.

Sharon softened a number of his positions before and during Cheney's visit — he pulled Israeli troops out of Palestinian-run areas, he dropped his demand of seven days of absolute calm before the truce, and raised the prospect of Arafat traveling abroad.

In a meeting between Israeli and Palestinian security officials on Monday, Israel presented its timetable for implementing the Tenet plan and said it needed about a month to carry out its obligations, Palestinian security officials said. These include redeploying the army to positions held before the fighting began.

Large area of Antarctic ice collapses, scientists report

BY ROBERT BARR
Associated Press Writer

LONDON — A large Antarctic ice shelf in an area of the giant continent that is warming faster than the global average has collapsed with "staggering" rapidity, British scientists said Tuesday.

The shelf designated as Larsen B, 650 feet thick and with a surface area of 1,250 square miles, has collapsed into small icebergs and fragments, the British Antarctic Survey said. Before breaking apart, the ice shelf was about the size of Rhode Island.

The ice shelf collapse reported Tuesday was first detected on satellite images earlier this month by Ted Scambos of the National Snow and Ice Data Center at the University of Colorado.

"The reason this is worth paying attention to is that we're seeing a very rapid and profound response by the ice sheet to a warming that's been around for just a few decades," Scambos said.

"And we can use this as sort of a guide for what's going to happen if the rest of the Antarctic should begin to warm because of climate change."

David Vaughan, a glaciologist at the British Antarctic Survey, said the agency predicted three years ago that ice shelves would be disappearing.

"Since then, warming on the peninsula has continued and we watched as piece-by-piece Larsen B has retreated," Vaughan said.

"We knew what was left would collapse eventually, but the speed of it is staggering. Hard to believe that 500 million billion tons of ice sheet has disintegrated in less than a month."

In recent months, scientists have presented apparently contradictory evidence about warming in Antarctica. Two months ago, the journal Science reported new measurements which indicated that the ice in West Antarctica was thickening, rather than melting.

Scientists are unsure what to make of those measurements, but they are not incompatible with the recently observed ice sheet collapses because they apply to a region much closer to the South Pole than the Antarctic Peninsula.

Referred to as the "banana belt" by polar scientists, the peninsula is much closer to the equator than is the rest of Antarctica and surrounded on three sides by moderating seas.

In the past half century, the Antarctic Peninsula, which is nearest to southern Argentina and Chile, has warmed by 4.5 degrees Fahrenheit, much faster than average global warming, the Survey said. As a result, five ice shelves which extend out over the ocean along the peninsula have retreated.

In January, researchers Ian Joughin of the California Institute of Technology and Slawek Tulaczyk of the University of California, Santa Cruz, said ice was thickening in West Antarctica. The scientists said the change, if not merely part of some short-term fluctuation, represented a reversal of the long retreat of the ice.

Their finding came less than a week after a paper in the journal Nature reported that Antarctica's harsh desert valleys — long considered a bellwether for global climate change — had grown noticeably cooler since the mid-1980s.

New foreign satellite boosters made in Russia

BY VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV
Associated Press Writer

MOSCOW — Russia's premier aerospace company has developed a range of new booster rockets for foreign satellites in a bid to hold onto its share of the market for commercial launches, its director said Tuesday.

A Rokot booster developed by the Khrunichev State Research and Production Center put twin U.S.-German satellites into orbit on Sunday. The rocket was converted from a Soviet-designed SS-19 ballistic missile.

The unmanned German spacecraft, nicknamed Tom and Jerry, will fly in tandem to create what scientists hope will be the most accurate map ever of the Earth's gravitational field.

Khrunichev's director, Alexander Medvedev, said his company earned about $10 million for the launch, which was barely above production cost.

"We have to charge bottom price" to remain competitive, he said at a news conference.

Medvedev said that the launch price could be increased later as Rokot wins a market niche. He said another three Rokot launches are set for this year.

Thanks to its heavy-lift Proton, Khrunichev has become the top cash cow for the beleaguered Russian space industry, putting commercial satellites — mostly foreign — into high, geostationary orbits throughout the 1990s.

Russia receives tens of millions of dollars for each launch, a coveted revenue source for an industry struggling to survive on a fraction of generous Soviet-era state funding.

Medvedev blamed a sluggish global market for commercial space launches for last year's drop in the number of Proton launches. Khrunichev launched only two Western satellites into orbit atop Protons last year. Another two commercial launches set for 2001 were postponed until this year because of problems with satellites, Medvedev said.

He said his company had invested part of the earnings from commercial launches into research and development works for Rokot, Proton-M and the next-generation Angara rocket.

Khrunichev has also paid for upgrading the crumbling Soviet-era infrastructure of the Baikonur cosmodrome, which Russia leases from the former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan, and Russia's own Plesetsk cosmodrome used for Sunday's launch.

INTERNATIONAL



Froilan Gallardo/ Associated Press

A U.S. Special Forces soldier, left, helps a wounded Filipino soldier to a waiting Philippine Air Force helicopter at the remote village of Atong Atong in Lantawan town, Basilan Island, Southern Philippines on Tuesday. U.S. Special Forces involved in a joint counter-terrorism exercise helped retrieve, treat and evacuate two Filipino soldiers during a clash with the Muslim extremist group Abu Sayyaf on the outskirts of Lantawan.

U.S. troops enter combat zone as Filipinos clash with Muslim extremists

BY JIM GOMEZ
Associated Press Writer

UPPER MANGGAS, Philippines — Muslim extremists unleashed a volley of grenades and small arms fire on a Filipino army patrol Tuesday, wounding two soldiers, and prompting Green Berets to try to retrieve the injured men — only the second time Americans have ventured into the combat zone.

The clash between about 30 Filipino troops and a group of Abu Sayyaf rebels erupted within earshot of the Green Berets as they attended a town meeting on the southern island of Basilan to discuss local residents' safety concerns.

Abu Sayyaf is believed to have links to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida terrorist network.

At least four rebels were killed in several hours of fighting on the outskirts of Lantawan town, officials said. Elite Philippine troops captured six more rebels as they fled the fighting.

After a series of frantic radio calls, the four Green Berets learned that Filipino platoon commander Lt. Lemuel Beduya had a serious head wound and one of his men was shot in the arm. Both were pinned down by enemy fire only about two miles from where the Americans were meeting local residents at Atong Atong village.

"I was calling on the radio and then I met a hail of bullets — pop, pop, pop," Beduya later told The Associated Press as U.S. troops treated his bleeding head wound. "They had a sniper with them. I asked my men to stay and not withdraw. I thought my time had already come."

As the fight raged, the elite U.S. troops piled into a blue pickup truck and headed out to evacuate the wounded Philippine soldiers. They were joined by government soldiers in another truck and an armored personnel carrier.

Heavy fighting blocked the rescue effort and the two wounded Filipino soldiers eventually were pulled by their comrades to the safety of a helicopter landing zone away from the battle.

The Green Berets set out again for the landing zone.

"Let's rock n' roll," shouted one of them, driving and singing along to blaring Latin pop music on the truck stereo. Another fixed his assault rifle on the wild coconut groves whizzing past the window.

About 160 U.S. Special Forces members and 500 other American personnel are in the southern Philippines to train Filipino soldiers battling the rebels, who hold hostage Wichita, Kan., missionaries Martin and Gracia Burnham and Filipina nurse Ediborah Yap.

The U.S. soldiers are armed but can only fire in self defense. The Special Forces members on Basilan must always stay with local Filipino commanders.

They have been in combat zones, so far at least, only to treat Filipino wounded. Friday night, two U.S. Pave Hawk helicopters evacuated three wounded soldiers and hauled out one of their dead after a clash with the Abu Sayyaf in the same area.

Unmanned U.S. surveillance aircraft overfly the island regularly, increasing the number of sightings of and engagements with the highly mobile guerrillas.

Also crucial, say Philippine commanders, is the U.S. night flight capability, particularly in evacuating men injured during clashes in the inky jungle darkness.

In the past, some wounded soldiers bled to death while being hauled overland for treatment.

The Abu Sayyaf, thought to have numbered 1,000 before an army offensive started last June, now is estimated at only 60 fighters on Basilan, about 620 miles south of Manila.

As a Green Beret helped the two wounded soldiers into a helicopter clearing Tuesday, another used a fuchsia-colored flag to mark the landing spot. A third radioed for two Philippine Huey helicopters.

"You'll be OK. You'll be OK," said Sgt. Robert Burton to the lieutenant with the head wound. The Green Beret administered an intravenous drip. "The bird is inbound."

Burton was part of the evacuation effort in the same region on Friday.

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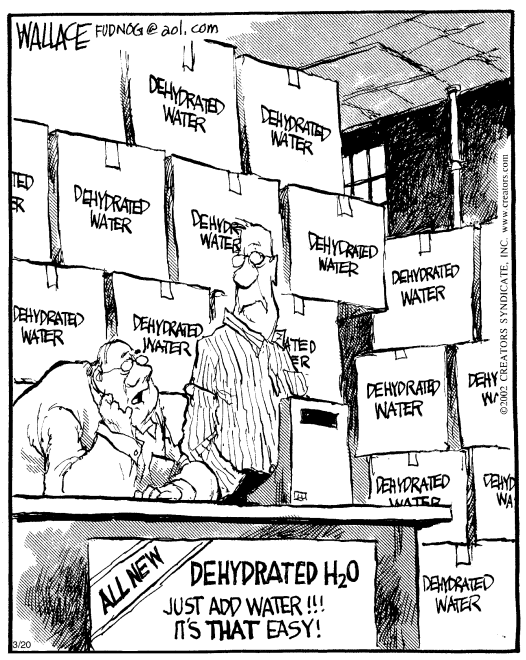
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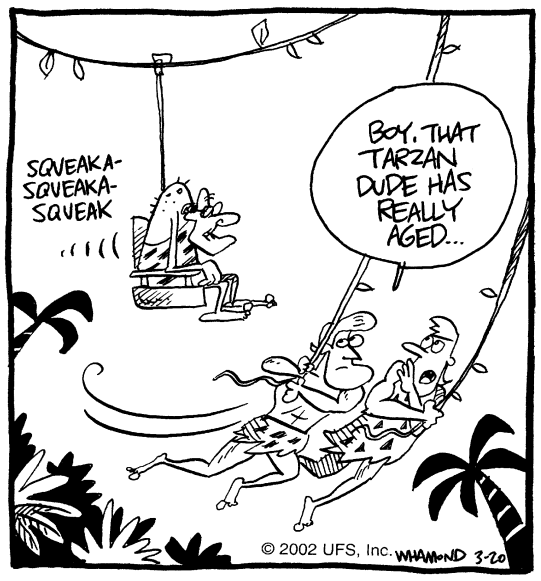
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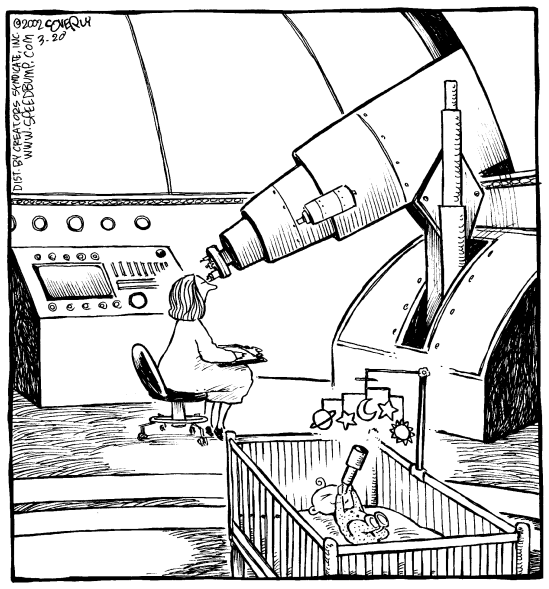
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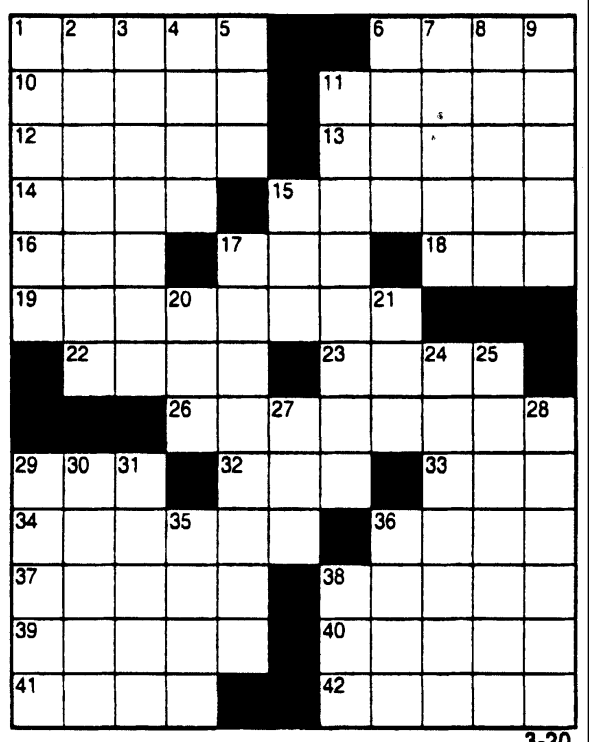
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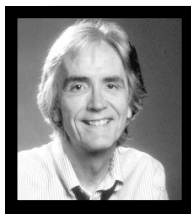
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Yesterday's answer



3-20

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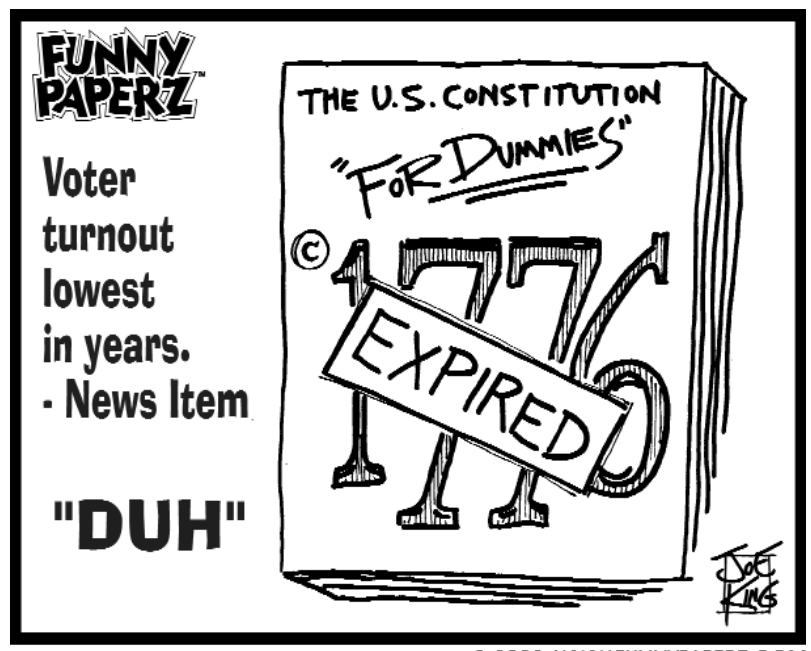
by Chuck Shepard

Boss shows misconduct with astrology

• An editor of a major Sri Lanka astrology magazine resigned in November, concerned that his boss was using planet-alignment readings to make political commentary, thus undermining readers' faith in astrology.

• A Nigerian transportation official urged in November that citizens de-emphasize their heavy reliance on automobile icon charms to keep them safe, urging instead that they concentrate on the rules of the road (as similarly urged by the governor of Trang, Thailand, when informed in February of the heavy use of auto charms to overcome evil ghosts at the town's major traffic intersections).

• In January, the Kanda Myojin Shinto shrine in Tokyo began selling its own information-technology-prayer charms to ward off computer viruses.



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BACK PAGE

ODDS & ENDS

Producer to pay millions in back taxes

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Hollywood producer Mario Kassar has agreed to pay nearly $45 million in unpaid taxes to the Internal Revenue Service, ending a 14 year dispute with the federal agency, court documents show.

Kassar, who helped make the "Rambo" action series starring Sylvester Stallone and "Total Recall" with Arnold Schwarzenegger, will pay $38 million in taxes for the 1988, 1989, and 1990 tax years, according to U.S. Tax Court records. The remainder of the settlement covers penalties he incurred over that time.

"It was a satisfying resolution for both sides," said Kassar's tax attorney Steven Toscher. "It took a long time, but we're happy it's just done."

Kassar, who founded Carolco Pictures, was accused of using company loans for art and real estate purchases but never was considered income in tax documents. Federal officials had begun a criminal investigation into the production company's dealings but was eventually abandoned when they failed to get a conviction against former Carolco President Peter Hoffman on four felony tax charges in 1997.

After reeling off several hits in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Carolco filed for bankruptcy in 1995 and has since been liquidated.

Fellow Carolco executive Andy Vajna agreed last year to pay $6.5 million in back taxes with no penalties. Both Kassar and Vajna are teaming up again to produce "Terminator 3," starring Schwarzenegger.

Rocker's son arrested for drug violation

By The Associated Press

WEST HOLLYWOOD — The son of rocker Rod Stewart was arrested near the Viper Room nightclub for allegedly possessing controlled drugs.

Sean Roderick Stewart, 21, was booked Saturday for investigation of possessing a controlled substance, possessing a controlled medication without a prescription, disorderly conduct and public intoxication. He spent the night in jail and was freed on bail.

Stewart had a court hearing scheduled Tuesday for another confrontation in which he allegedly attacked someone at a Malibu restaurant in December.

Stewart was seen lying on the sidewalk near the Sunset Boulevard club shortly after 11 p.m. Saturday, according to a report from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

The Viper Room is where actor River Phoenix died of a drug overdose in October 1993.

Stewart "was stiff, shivering and incoherent. His eyes were droopy, his speech was slurred and mumbled," the report said.

A bottle containing what appeared to be the painkiller Vicodin, the sedatives Valium and Klonopin and an unknown substance was seized, the report said.

Stewart told deputies he did not have a prescription for any of the drugs, according to the report.

Bonnnie Raitt receives Walk of Fame star

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Grammy-winner Bonnie Raitt gave her fans something to talk about as she received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame on Tuesday.

Raitt's father, veteran Broadway singer John Raitt, was on hand to perform "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning" and ended the song with "Everything is Going Bonnie's Way."

"I can't believe that in my 50s, I'm standing here with my Walk of Fame star," said Raitt, whose star was unveiled in front of her record label, Capitol.

"If someone proposed this to me 20 years ago, I would have said, 'No way,'" she said.

Several hundred fans celebrated with the singer-guitarist, whose music runs the gamut of blues, country, pop, and rock. Raitt, 52, has won nine Grammys and recorded dozens of albums including "Give It Up," "Takin' My Time," and her 1989 breakout, "Nick of Time."

Judge praises Downey Jr. for rehabilitation

By The Associated Press

INDIO — Robert Downey Jr. got praise from a judge during a court hearing Tuesday to evaluate his progress since being placed on probation for drug offenses.

Judge Randall D. White determined that Downey was staying clean and urged him to continue treatment.

The actor appeared in a dark suit and looked healthy. He did not speak to reporters, but agreed to sign autographs for fans outside the courthouse.

While his attorney has said Downey will eventually return to work, the actor has said his primary concerns now are staying sober and spending time with his son and family.

He was sentenced in July to a year at a live-in rehabilitation center and three years probation after pleading no-contest to cocaine possession and being under the influence.

Downey was arrested in Palm Springs in November 2000. Authorities allegedly found the drugs in his hotel room. Any probation violation could send him to prison for up to four years.

His legal troubles started in 1996 when authorities found cocaine, heroin and a pistol in his vehicle. A month later he passed out in a neighbor's home and was hospitalized at a substance abuse treatment center. Three days later, he was arrested for leaving the center.

In August 1999, Downey was sentenced to three years in prison for violating probation by missing scheduled drug tests. He was released a year later.

He sought drug rehabilitation after he was arrested again last April and tests showed he had traces of cocaine in his system. That arrest cost him his "Ally McBeal" role, but no charges were filed.

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