

FREE

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Santa Monica Daily Press

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Boathouse could be a sinking ship

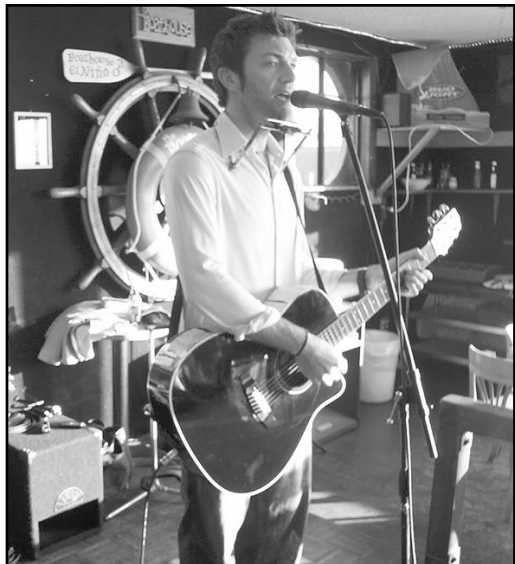
Restaurant on pier faces eviction, judge rules

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON

Daily Press Staff Writer

Santa Monica Pier's oldest restaurant may be forced to shut its doors this week after a judge ruled that the city has a right to evict the family-owned Boathouse.

Santa Monica Superior Court Judge Diana Wheatley ruled on Wednesday that the Boathouse, owned by Naia Sheffield and her family for the past 50 years, owes



Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press
Damian Joyce performs upstairs at the Boathouse Sunday afternoon.

the city \$25,000 in back rent, plus attorney fees. Judge Wheatley also ruled that the restaurant must vacate the premises.

The latest decision comes after years of Sheffield battling with the city on the restaurant's lease agreement. The city, which owns the pier, supposedly offered the Boathouse a long-term lease three years ago but instead only offered a month-to-month lease. The city gave the Boathouse until last fall to vacate the premises.

Boathouse manager Cindy Pfeifer said the Boathouse attempted to pay the city its monthly rent, but the city sent the checks back.

The Santa Monica City Council voted this past summer to enter into a contract with the movie-themed restaurant chain Bubba Gump after the Pier Restoration Corporation considered several bids — including the Boathouse — to occupy the 4,500-square-foot building located on the beach.

"The PRC and the city wanted to have a competition for the tenants on the pier where the Boathouse is," said PRC chairman Michael Klein. "(The Boathouse's) proposal just didn't meet what we wanted.

"I bear no ill will toward them and I wish that their bid was a good bid," Klein added.

As part of Judge Wheatley's ruling, Los Angeles County marshals can take possession of the building this week. City officials say they expect to secure the building and take inventory on its contents in the next few weeks.

See BOATHOUSE, page 3



Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press
Torrance residents George Martinez and Sue Ha come to the Boathouse every week to dance during salsa Sunday.

Olympic to SAMOHI: Can we have this dance?

Olympic students want to come to SAMOHI's senior prom this year

BY ANDREW H. FIXMER

Daily Press Staff Writer

Seniors from both of Santa Monica's high schools may end up sharing their last dance together.

Without having a prom of their own, Olympic High School students have asked the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School Board to let them attend the Santa Monica High School's senior prom.

Olympic High School is a continuation school that educates students who have to stay home to care for sick parents or who have to work 40-hour weeks to help support their families. For some students, it can take longer than four years to graduate.

Classes at Olympic High School are

so small that the school's senior class participates in SAMOHI's graduation ceremony.

And now the students want to be part of the school's last party of the year.

"Prom is a celebration of your senior year, and they would like that opportunity," said Olympic High School Principal Suzanne Toyryla. "The only reason I'm absolutely for us attending the Santa Monica prom is because we are not big enough to have our own."

Olympic High School has 128 students, and 26 of them have graduated since July. The high school may break its record this year by graduating 50 students, Toyryla said.

Olympic seniors are allowed to attend SAMOHI's senior prom, but only as someone's date.

Some school administrators said Olympic students could attend SAMOHI's prom, as long as they meet the same attendance and discipline guidelines set forth by the high school.

See PROM, page 3

Rent control board sues landlord for delinquency

Attorneys search for building owner for months

BY ANDREW H. FIXMER

Daily Press Staff Writer

The Santa Monica Rent Control Board has sued a landlord for failing to prove that she's renting to low-income tenants.

The lawsuit filed in Santa Monica Court targets Sunnie Han, who owns a 14-unit apartment complex at 1328 Euclid Street. The suit claims she hasn't fulfilled her

obligation to prove that she is renting two of her units to low-income residents.

As a participant in the city's incentive housing program, Han is required to rent at least two of her apartments under affordable guidelines, city officials said.

But attempting to charge Han of her alleged infractions proved to be nearly impossible for the board's attorney, Doug Willis.

He couldn't find Han for more than five months — from June to October of last year.

See SUIT, page 3

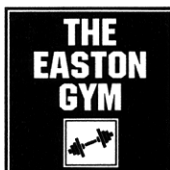
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★★★★★-Dynamic ★★★★★-Positive ★★★★★-Average
★★-So-so ★-Difficult

♈ ARIES (March 21-April 19)

★★★★★ Allow your imagination to help you solve a problem. Count on your abilities to research and brainstorm. You find solutions because you want to. Someone close to you might do the inverse, as he or she appears to specialize in uproar. Tonight: Go with the unexpected.

♉ TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

★★★ Anchor with the basics. Deal with someone on a one-on-one level. Finances take you in a new direction. Unexpected developments surround work, impacting your personal life. Stay even with those around you, if possible. Tonight: Mosey on home.

♊ GEMINI (May 21-June 20)

★★★★★ Clear out messages and return calls. You might feel as if another will do whatever he or she wants in order to get the results he or she desires. Information opens your eyes wide. Do check out what is happening here. Refuse to play into gossip. Tonight: Stop and visit with a friend.

♋ CANCER (June 21-July 22)

★★★ Your finances could cause some stress. Try not to twist and turn the facts so that they work; instead, take a hard look at what goes on with a partner or someone who wants some form of financial recompense. Deal with this person with kid gloves. Tonight: Restructure your budget.

♌ LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)

★★★★★ Put your best foot forward. Don't settle for speculation. Ask for the facts. As a result, you'll develop a stronger sense of what is gossip and what is reality. Carefully discuss a travel opportunity. Listen to another's perspective, but don't buy into it. Tonight: Do your thing.

♍ VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

★★★ A partner makes suggestions that take you in a different direction than you intended. Your family takes precedence in a personal matter. A partner or associate feeds you important information. Curb a tendency to be nervous. Tonight: Rest up. It's a big week.

♎ LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)

★★★★★ Where your friends are takes you in a new direction. Listen to feedback from your friends, especially involving another who could be a strong personality in your life. Speak your mind in a way that can make a difference. Use your Libran verbal skills. Tonight: So what if it is Monday?

♏ SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)

★★★★★ Listen to another more carefully. How you see a situation developing could make a difference if you take charge, but you know that already. Be more of a friend to a loved one. Extend yourself. Nurture someone who could use a pat on the back. Tonight: Work late.

♐ SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

★★★★★ Reach out for someone at a distance. Your ability to see another helps you to be much more yourself. Your helpful and happy personality allows you to open new doors. Work with the unexpected, making the most of the moment. Tonight: Answer your e-mail.

♑ CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

★★★★★ You might not be sure how to handle a powerful associate or someone who holds the key to a money matter. You might reverse your opinions on a powerful matter. Your family anchors you with a sense of well-being. Check out an investment. Tonight: Go along with another's plans.

♒ AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

★★★★★ Use care with someone who means a lot to you. How you verbalize your feelings could make a big difference in its reception. Your softer side emerges. Try not to be so provocative with your decisions, actions and ideas. Tonight: Let another make the call.

♓ PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)

★★★ An even temperament could take you in a new direction. Your boss could be dominant in his or her decisions. Take your lunch break out of the office or away from others. Browse for cards or find a gift for a dear friend. The change in pace proves helpful. Tonight: Go for easy.



QUOTE of the DAY

“There is no money in poetry, but then there is no poetry in money, either.”

— Robert Graves

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LOCAL



City, PRC pick Bubba Gump to replace Boathouse



Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press

The Boathouse on the pier faces a court-ordered eviction this week after a judge ruled the restaurant no longer has a lease with the city.

BOATHOUSE, from page 1

If the city takes possession this week, the building will remain empty throughout the summer — the pier's busiest time of the season.

"It will be very sad to have this empty this summer," Pfeifer said. "At sunset, that bar and patio is just packed because it's the only view of the beach."

Bubba Gump has 15 months to remodel the old, wooden building. The company, owned by Paramount, could spend upwards of \$3 million renovating the restaurant. It's expected to open next spring.

On Sunday, the Boathouse was hopping with patrons listening to musician Damian Joyce play to the crowd upstairs, while the basement was jamming with the weekly salsa event.

For the past five years, the Boathouse has held a salsa dance from 2 p.m.-10 p.m., which

attracts hundreds of people, said Laura Canellias, the event's coordinator.

While people were cutting up the dance floor and watching the sunset, most of them had no idea it may be the last Sunday afternoon for the Boathouse.

"It's a great place to come for the afternoon," Canellias said. "Right now, it's up to the lawyers but I would hate to think we would be closed next week."

Sheffield is suing the city in U.S. District Court, claiming it violated her right to due process, breach of contract, unlawful taking and that the city intentionally misrepresented the lease agreement.

It is unclear whether Sheffield will file an appeal on the court's latest decision, which may grant a stay on the eviction.

"I hope they are not knocking on our door Monday," Pfeifer said.

Santa Monica high schools may share one senior prom

PROM, from page 1

"All things should be equal," said Superintendent John Deasy. "Any student meeting academic and disciplinary standards should be able to go to the prom."

The superintendent said he already had contacted principals at both high schools to combine the senior classes for the dance.

Toyrila agrees that her students should be held to the same standards as SAMOHI seniors.

"If they are allowed to go, it should be under the same requirements that Santa Monica High School students have," she said. "If you're going to the same prom then you have to abide by the same rules and guidelines."

Oscar de la Torre, director of the Pico Youth and Family Center, works with many Olympic students on a daily basis. He said the students feel like they are miss-

ing an important part of high school by not having a prom.

"This issue brings about the question of whether there is a double standard that exists in the school district between students that attend Olympic and students that attend SAMOHI," he said. "I think Santa Monica High School feels the need to control who attends the prom, and they may not like this idea very much."

SAMOHI co-principals Kristin Hibert and Mark Kelly did not return repeated phone calls.

Some critics believe that bringing the two schools together could create safety problems because they think rivalries at the schools run high and students may get into fights.

But Toyrila said her staff, who knows which students are good and which ones are not, would attend the prom

and try to keep tensions low.

"We know who the bad apples are, and we also know who the real sweethearts are too," she said. "Sure, we have our bad kids, but they do too."

Toyrila also said bringing the seniors together at the prom would help dispel any myths about continuing education students.

"There are a lot of successful people in this state and in this community who were continuation students," she said. "If more people would step up and say 'I'm a continuation graduate,' then we could get past all this."

One SAMOHI student doesn't see a problem with inviting Olympic students to the senior prom.

"I don't see why it would be such a big deal," said Camille Thorsen. "Most of those kids are from Santa Monica or even went to SAMOHI at some point."

Rent control board looks to settle with apartment owner

SUIT, from page 1

He tried serving Han with the lawsuit at her apartment complex, her home, her Los Angeles office and finally at her attorney's office. But all attempts were unsuccessful.

Willis showed up in Santa Monica Superior Court late last month to convince the court to order Han to make her next two vacant apartments available for low-income tenants.

When contacted by the Daily Press, Han's attorney, Henry T. Heuer, said his client is easily accessible. Han has been doing business in Santa Monica unaware that the Rent Control Board is after her.

"Nobody is hiding from anyone,"

Heuer said. "This is ridiculous. If they have questions, they should call me. I have been practicing law in the same Century City office for 25 years and I'm not hard to find."

The suit alleges that Han is delinquent in providing the necessary paperwork showing that low-income residents live in her building.

Heuer said city attorneys contacted him six months ago about a possible lawsuit against Han, but nobody followed up with the complaint so he assumed the matter was settled.

Willis, who works part-time for the board, wouldn't comment because he is

trying to settle with Han out of court.

"We're still going forward with it," he said. "But at this point, I'm hoping this is going to settle."

Heuer said the rent control board may have a personal vendetta against his client, adding Han is the subject of a smear campaign waged by the city.

"I have known Ms. Han for years and she is an honorable and decent person," Heuer said. "The city of Santa Monica is on a campaign to ruin her reputation."

Han didn't return messages by the Daily Press seeking comment for this story.

Willis would not say whether suing Han was part of a new policy shift by the

board when it comes to enforcing its rules. But the suit may be the first of its kind levied by the Rent Control Board, he said.

"We don't file that many lawsuits," he said. "I couldn't tell you if it indicates anything."

Willis said the majority of landlords that signed contracts with the Rent Control Board to participate in the incentive housing program have fulfilled their affordable housing obligations.

Han's case has been moved to the Beverly Hills Superior Court. It is scheduled to be heard next month, attorneys said.

"That was the court's action," said Willis. "It wasn't due to a request by the parties."

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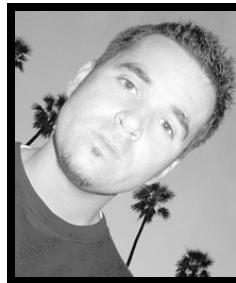
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OPINION



The FunHog By Dan Dunn

And then it yawned on me: I'm getting old

I pulled a muscle in my back the other day. The injury itself is distressing enough, since my threshold for pain is lower than the IQ of most blonde porn stars.

When I get hurt, I whine. Incessantly. To anyone who'll listen. In fact, now might be a good time to turn to another page and spare yourself the drudgery.

The thing is, it's not the nagging pain in my lower back that troubles me most, it's HOW it got there. It's HOW I hurt myself. I did it yawning.

It dawned on me that I needed to get in shape. I figured the best way to do so was to resume my cardiovascular routine. Problem was, I couldn't quite remember what that routine entailed. Then I remembered: I never HAD a cardiovascular routine. Caffeine and cigarettes kept me thin in college.

On the way home from my weekly Mon-Khmer lesson (I've mentioned my passion for the Austro-Asiatic languages before, yes?), I had occasion to stop and reflect upon life in the New Millennium, in a new home, in a new city (Santa Monica), in a new state of mind (SoCal-induced boredom). And in that moment of quiet reverie I involuntarily opened my mouth wide and breathed in deeply ... and that's when something suddenly "popped" slightly to the north of my butt crack.

When I was a young man — last week, actually — I had a swaggering aura about me cultivated by a sense of invincibility. I could run fast, jump high, party hard and make love like a porn star (insert your own IQ zinger here).

When you're a young man, the world is your raw oyster, and it's just waiting for you to slurp it down whole, with a cold beer chaser. When you're a young man, you feel as indomitable as a Randy Johnson fastball.

And then one day, the simple act of yawning becomes too much for the body to handle. That's the day you cease to be a young man ingesting bivalve mollusks to put the carnal ocean in motion. That's the day you're reduced to tossing weak Charlie Hough-like knucklers.

That's the day you first notice the shadow of a social security check creeping across the lawn. That day, you get old.

Floored by this realization, I did what everybody in Hollywood does in the midst of a personal crisis: I grabbed my cell phone and called my agent.

"I'M OLD!" I howled. "I just hurt myself yawning!"

"Have you told anyone else yet?" he replied, his voice tinged with panic.

"Uh ... no ... why?"

He breathed an audible sigh of relief. "Whatever you do, DON'T LET ANYONE KNOW YOU'RE OLD!" he said. "In this business, you get old, you die."

The same could be said for life in general, but rather than belabor the obvious to a guy who thinks Katie Holmes is the next Meryl Streep, I did what everybody in Hollywood does when an agent starts dispensing specious counsel: I hung up and went to Starbucks.

How did I get so soft? I wondered while sipping a frothy triple caramel macchiato. It seemed like only yesterday I was strong and virile. I'd spent a lifetime doing things a hell of a lot more strenuous than yawning, and not once had I ever come up lame.

It dawned on me that I needed to get in shape. I figured the best way to do so was to resume my cardiovascular routine. Problem was, I couldn't quite remember what that routine entailed. Then I remembered: I never HAD a cardiovascular routine. Caffeine and cigarettes kept me thin in college.

Perhaps it's too late, anyway. When yawns precipitate back spasms, it augurs for an impending respite on a mortician's slab. Surely my post-mortem corporeal decomposition cycle has gotten off to an early start. At any moment, a sneeze could cause my spleen to rupture. One bad case of the hiccups, and I'm done for.

In the end, I decided I wasn't getting enough Starbucks' products in my diet. Caffeine, after all, is a stimulant that wards off yawning. In fact, sipping my second frothy triple caramel macchiato of the day, I began to feel like a million bucks again. So I did what everybody in Hollywood does when they're thinking millions: I started writing a screenplay.

Tentatively titled "The Old Man and The Sea of Hip-Hoppers," my script chronicles the adventures of a feeble thirtysomething scribe who reconnects with his youth by getting tattooed and pierced beyond recognition. My agent loves the concept - he thinks we can get Katie Holmes to sign on to play the female lead.

And I've gotten serious about reversing the process of my deteriorating physical condition. My agent hooked me up with a psychotherapist/exercise physiologist named Gar who recommended I spend less time yawning, and more time focusing on physical activities that stimulate me, such as baseball.

So I bought seasons tickets to the Dodgers, and my back has never felt better.

(Dan Dunn, a Santa Monica resident, writes for Warner Bros. Online and appears in the Daily Press every Monday. For more FunHog fun, check out www.thefunhog.com).

LETTERS

Sticking up for the parlor

Editor:

For the record, the Omelet Parlor is not the only business on Main Street that is appalled by what has happened with the farmer's market. This marketplace has more in common with the Venice Boardwalk than it does to a true farmer's market. It has grown beyond the original intent, which was to provide the community with fresh produce, into an absolute zoo, complete with the pony ride.

Mr. Bloch's letter was not only mean spirited but was lacking in factual content to the point where it was almost comical. Taking cheap shots at the Omelet Parlor may have made Mr. Bloch feel better, but he completely ignores the fact that this activity has produced a tremendous parking problem. It may be true that most of the people walk to the farmer's market, but enough of them drive to create a traffic gridlock on Sunday morning. His argument of the market evolving into what the public wants does not justify the fact that it violates its conditional use permit.

Mr. Bloch is certainly entitled to eat breakfast for less than \$9 and this is why we have Denny's and Norm's. I own and operate two restaurants on Main Street and I could care less what they sell at the farmer's market. What I do resent is the fact that absolutely nothing has been done to address the parking problem created by this Sunday morning activity.

Theodore Lonsway

Finn McCool's

Lula Cocina Mexicana

Community is a team effort

Editor:

I have been meaning to write to welcome your paper and your staff to town. I and many others are very glad you're here, and look forward to our Daily Press, either in newsprint or in that great online format you offer.

But what finally prompted this letter is Saturday's article about the Dolphin Change Program, The Chamber Homeless Task Force and other non-profits and entities in which I'm involved.

Chris Young did a great job writing, and I know you have limited space, but I just want to emphasize that whatever I do is multiplied a thousand times by the efforts of all the rest who also volunteer in this community.

The co-chairs of the Chamber's Super Bowl-A-Thon, Donna Evans and Marilyn Beck, are the powers behind our fundraising efforts which allows the Homeless Task Force to do so much.

They are tireless and amazing! The directors of the Bayside District Corporation conceived of and funded the initial Dolphin Change Banks — what commitment to our community!

Our task force members like Kathy Irby of Encino State Bank and Laurel Rosen of the Lobster give incredible amounts of time.

There are many more names, and faces behind the names. And they all help make Santa Monica great.

Karen Bauer

Santa Monica

Opinions expressed are those of the writer and do not necessarily reflect those of the Santa Monica Daily Press staff. Guest editorials from residents are encouraged, as are letters to the editor. Letters will be published on a space-available basis. It is our intention to publish all letters we receive, except those that are libelous or are unsigned. Preference will be given to those that are e-mailed to sack@smdp.com. All letters must include the author's name and telephone number for purposes of verification. Letters also may be mailed to our offices located at 530 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 200, Santa Monica, 90401, or faxed to (310) 576-9913. All letters and guest editorials are subject to editing for space and content.

YOUR OPINION MATTERS!

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LOCAL



CrimeWatch

Men grabbing women tops week's crime

An apparent dispute between a man and woman on March 3 led to what police are calling a carjacking after the girlfriend stole her boyfriend's car.

Police say at 11:50 a.m. the victim called officers to his home near the 1400 block of Lincoln Boulevard. He told police he met an acquaintance at a party in East Los Angeles. He brought her to his home and the next morning, she asked for a ride home. The victim said he would drive her back to East Los Angeles shortly but before he could, she approached the victim from behind and placed an unknown object in his back and demanded the car. The female, 17, drove away with the white Acura Legend. It was recovered that same day in Pico Rivera.

■ Police are classifying a transient who grabbed a woman's breast on March 8 in the 1500 block of Second Street as a suspect for sexual assault.

Officers responded at 11:56 p.m. when the victim told police that the suspect approached her and her friends and introduced himself. He asked for a kiss from the victim, but she refused. That's when he grabbed her breast. She and her friends ran away and called police. The suspect, described as an oriental male in his 30s and about 5 feet, nine inches tall, was last seen walking north on Ocean Avenue.

■ A woman was forced into her ex-boyfriend's car at the intersection of Second Street and Broadway Avenue and taken to the 600 block Adelaide Drive.

At 8:05 p.m. on March 8, officers responded to a call of a woman being forced into a vehicle. While in route, officers got a second call from a resident on Adelaide Drive who reported a female yelling for help.

Officers determined the vehicle matched the description involved in the first incident and contacted the victim, who confirmed she was forced into the car. She said the suspect was her ex-boyfriend who has been continuously following her.

The suspect, Douglas Emerick, 25, of Tarzana, was booked for kidnapping, stalking and violating his probation. His bail is set at \$150,000.

■ On March 7 a teenager and her mother reported that the girl had encountered a man four days earlier who touched her butt.

The victim told police that at 9 a.m. on March 3 she was in the 2600 block of Main Street when the suspect approached her and her friend. He "padded" her butt and then fled on foot. He is described as a white male in his 30s and is five feet, three inches tall.

■ Two men received a citation for possessing less than an ounce of marijuana after police found them smoking a joint on March 9 at 10:50 a.m. in the 1600 block of Ocean Front Walk. The marijuana was confiscated.

Just minutes before at the same location, police responded to complaint of people drinking alcohol. Police contacted the subjects and took one of them, identified as Ivy Daigle, 31, into custody after the learned that he was a parolee on a burglary charge. He was transported to the Los Angeles County men's jail.

Vivendi pulls plug on film deal with Ovitz firm

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Vivendi Universal has halted financing of a joint film production venture it had with a unit of Michael Ovitz's Artists Management Group, the companies jointly announced over the weekend.

Under the settlement, Vivendi will pay AMG's Artists Production Group a "substantial amount of money" but will stop providing it with overhead and development financing, said Michael Burns, a spokesman for Artists Management Group.

In July 2000, Vivendi's StudioCanal USA unit struck a three-year deal with the Artists Production Group to provide the venture with \$8 million in annual funding with the hope of making 12 to 15 films.

Now, with 16 months left in the deal, there are 17 projects in various stages of development — but none that have entered production.

Vivendi will retain a financial interest in those nascent projects, but Artists Production Group will assume control of them as it seeks new funding and distribution partners, Burns said.

Burns said the group has four other projects that it previously removed from under the umbrella of the partnership and moved to other studios to keep alive.

Vivendi Universal is expected to close StudioCanal, a division of French pay-television Canal Plus, as it consolidates the various specialty film units it owns. The giant media company is expected to close on its purchase of the entertainment assets of USA Networks this spring.

The settlement announced Saturday is a setback to Ovitz and his Artist Management Group, which has suffered hits to its television unit as well as the departure of some executives.

Ovitz, once revered as one of the most powerful men in Hollywood, co-founded Creative Artists Management before leaving to become president of The Walt Disney Co. in 1995.

Ovitz left that position in a highly publicized fallout that garnered him \$38 million in cash and roughly \$100 million in Disney shares.

He began Artists Management Group three years ago, brokering film and television deals with its own roster of stars, including Cameron Diaz.

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ENTERTAINMENT

Keeping nerves in check on Oscar night is hardest act

BY ANGIE WAGNER

Associated Press Writer

LOS ANGELES — Oscar nominees tried just about anything to keep their nerves in check Sunday.

Marisa Tomei, nominated for best supporting actress for "In the Bedroom," had a massage. Halle Berry, a best-actress nominee for "Monster's Ball," brought her mom to the awards.

Peter Jackson, director of "The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring," wore a lucky pin.

Ron Howard, nominated for directing "A Beautiful Mind," kept two letters tucked into his jacket. He said two of his three daughters wrote him letters and told him not to read them until he gets nervous.

Not everyone arrived with a case of the jitters, however.

"I'm cucumber cool," said Tom Wilkinson, a best-actor nominee for "In the Bedroom."

Will Smith, competing against Wilkinson in that category, made a relaxed entrance with his wife, Jada Pinkett Smith.

Asked how he stays calm, the star of "Ali" didn't hesitate: "Don't give a damn," he said. "You cannot allow yourself to care."

Sandra Bullock and Hugh Grant arrived arm in arm but said it was only because they were presenting the best original score award together.

"We'd met several times. We didn't really like each other," Bullock joked.

Grant said Bullock likes to strut along the red carpet more than she enjoys the Oscars show itself.

"Nothing's wrong with being shallow," Grant told her. "Shallow's great."

Fans yelled "Frodo, Frodo" when Elijah Wood made his trip down the red carpet.

"It's slightly crazy," said the 21-year-old actor, who

plays Frodo the hobbit in "The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring."

Wood said he's getting used to the attention from loyal hobbit fans.

But "nothing so strange as people calling me Frodo," he said.

Academy Awards host Whoopi Goldberg brought down the house with her entrance to start the show.

Dressed as a burlesque performer, she was lowered on a swing — a la "Moulin Rouge" — from the ceiling.

Once on stage, she took aim at the competition for Oscar votes that turned ugly in recent weeks.

"So much mud was thrown this year, all the nominees look black," she said.

Julia Roberts, who won the best-actress Oscar last year for "Erin Brockovich," connected briefly on the red carpet with Tobey Maguire, star of the upcoming "Spider-Man."

Roberts said she recently visited the actor on the set of the film.

"It was a little distracting," he said.

"Nice costume," Roberts countered about the skintight suit he wears to play the superhero.

Roberts was a presenter this year.

"Today's the day. My reign is over," she said before heading into the theater. "No more supermarket openings. I have to pass it on to the next gal."

Jon Voight, nominated for best supporting actor for playing Howard Cosell in "Ali," briefly slipped back into the character while being interviewed during his arrival at the Kodak Theatre, drawing a laugh from film critic Roger Ebert.

Voight said he's known Muhammed Ali for many years and also was an acquaintance of the late Cosell.

"I got a lot of entertainment out of Howard," the actor said.

Bob Balaban, producer of best-picture nominee "Gosford Park," was one of the first arrivals for this year's Oscars.

Two hours before the show, he already wanted to know where the food was.

"We only have seven or eight more hours to go," he told reporters. "Do you have any cookies over here?"

Balaban was surprised at the attention the movie has received, saying he originally thought Robert Altman's murder mystery was "depressing and you won't get it."

Stars play it safe in Oscar fashion

BY SAMANTHA CRITCHELL

Associated Press Writer

Halle Berry arrived at Sunday's Academy Awards in a wine-colored, A-line ballgown with a sheer bodice and strategically placed beaded flowers — a sexy departure for her and a fashion moment on a night when many stars played it safe.

"She's the new, hot style icon," Cindi Leive, editor in chief of Glamour, said of the best-actress nominee. "People are enjoying watching her."

Nicole Kidman chose a Chanel pink-chiffon, spaghetti-strap gown with tiers of ruffles running down the bodice, and 200 carats of raw Bulgari diamonds wrapped around her neck.

"Nicole's gown really showed how soft and pretty fashion is going," said Tom Julian, fashion commentator for Oscar.com.

The awards-show set generally chose classic styles, with relatively little jewelry and loose hairstyles.

Even Jennifer Lopez, known for some racy and risky outfits, wore a simple fitted pink strapless gown with gathered sides by Versace and a pearl necklace.

Jennifer Connelly, another fashion "it girl," wore a champagne-colored strapless gown with a tiered skirt by Balenciaga with matching scarf.

Previous best-actress winners Julia Roberts and Helen Hunt went for simple — and covered-up — styles: Roberts in a black jersey Giorgio Armani gown with back and side cutouts, and Hunt in a black satin, long-sleeve gown with a deep V-neck and lace-up front by Gucci.

In another red-carpet highlight, Laura Elena Harring wore a 77-carat Archduke Joseph Diamond valued at \$27 million and designed by Alfredo Molina, and \$1 million stiletto sandals by Stuart Weitzman to complement her black-and-red, strapless, beaded, floral gown by Armani.

"I think they thought it was the Cinderella story. I come from a small town in Mexico," said Harring, co-star of "Mulholland Drive."

Helen Mirren, nominated for best-supporting actress, was in a white Giorgio Armani ballgown, while fellow nominee Kate Winslet also wore red, an almost-strapless gown with a single floral strap. Marisa Tomei, also nominated in that category, had a similar one-strap look in a black gown with netted skirt and a diamond necklace draped around her neck.

Leive expected to see a lot of black on the red carpet, and black, she said, needs "the 'oh-my-God, what is she wearing' necklace."

Reese Witherspoon was in a black cap-sleeve dress with black lace detail; Naomi Watts wore a fitted black gown with crisscross straps; and Glenn Close was in a Vera Wang gown with sheer black sleeves.

Will Smith, a best-actor nominee, wore a monochromatic shirt-and-tie look in champagne, and his wife, Jada Pinkett Smith, was in a white wrap top with yellow skirt.

Leive said the audience was hoping for another Bjork swan dress from last year.

"A lot of people watch the red carpet for entertainment," she said. "They're not necessarily taking it as a cue of what they're wearing to tomorrow night's cocktail party."

"I think a lot of people secretly wish someone will look terrible, otherwise it's boring."



Nick Ut/Associated Press

Jack Griffith, right, cleans off an Oscar statue that sits on the red carpet outside the Kodak Theatre in the Hollywood section of Los Angeles on Sunday.

STATE



Devices to track your kid, car or the best fishing spot

BY MAY WONG
AP Technology Writer

SAN JOSE — Per Enge remembers the days when global positioning system devices were the size of microwave ovens, and how the military had to wait for a small window of time to obtain bearings.

Considered one of the pioneers of GPS, the Stanford University professor never imagined back then — more than two decades ago — how the technology would evolve, improving in performance while shrinking in size and cost to the point where GPS receivers can be built into all kinds of things.

Cars. Watches. Cell phones. Handheld computers. Even a microchip for humans.

GPS technology was once a tool used only by the government. Pilots, boat captains and map geeks followed as the navigation system — based now on a network of 24 satellites — became available for civilian use 24 hours a day.

Now there's an emerging crop of GPS-based devices that will help you find your child, car, or the best fishing spot.

Global positioning devices receive radio signals from satellites to tell users where on earth they are. Coupled with certain software and mapping programs, the devices can pinpoint locations by altitude, longitude and latitude, now to within one meter of accuracy. More consumer-friendly devices can direct users block by block to desired locations.

"It's stunning," Enge said. "In the beginning, the expected marketplace was 40,000 receivers — total — for military use. Today, we build 100,000 receivers a month, and most of it isn't for the military."

The GPS market in the United States will reach as high as \$13.3 billion in revenue and 33.1 million in unit shipments in 2006, from \$4.2 billion and 5.3 million units in 2001, predicts the Allied Business Intelligence Inc., a market research firm.

Wherify Wireless Inc. just introduced a GPS car-tracking device and a GPS-enabled battery pack that can turn a cell phone into a personal locator. In June, the company plans to start selling a wrist-watch-like device that can help parents find their children or track down a lost Alzheimer's patient.

Soon, Pulse Data HumanWare will have for the sight impaired a portable GPS navigation system that tells users where they are and how to get to more than 15 million "points of interest," such as museums and amusement parks, listed in its database.

Blind since birth, Carrie Schieu, 24, of Los Angeles, can't wait to use it: "I stick to routes I know because I don't have to rely on others for help ... This will help me be a little adventurous and go other places I haven't been."

Already, a growing number of golf courses are outfitting carts with GPS systems to help players measure distances between shots. More automakers are offering in-dash navigation, allowing drivers to get route directions or find the nearest restaurant.

Farmers are using GPS for precision mapping of crop yields and to keep their rows straight. Wildland firefighters are starting to use handheld computers with GPS to enhance tactical plans.

Even veteran GPS companies such as Trimble Navigation, Garmin Ltd. and Magellan Corp., now owned by Thales Navigation, are expanding beyond their traditional marine, aviation and outdoor enthusiast markets.

Garmin soon will introduce two-way radios with built-in GPS, allowing groups of users to know where their buddies are. A new Magellan GPS module will hook onto a Palm handheld.

"Today, we build 100,000 receivers a month, and most of it isn't for the military."

— PER ENGE
Stanford University professor

Applied Digital, which makes a tiny microchip that is implanted under the skin and contains medical information to be read by hospital scanners, is developing another implant device that would allow satellite tracking of an individual's every movement. The tracker is already attracting interest for tasks such as foiling kidnappings, the company says.

Technology advancements as well as the explosion in cell phones and handheld devices are helping to turbocharge a GPS market that analysts say has been growing slowly, at best, over the years.

Five years ago, SiRF Technology Inc., the leading GPS chip supplier, produced a chipset that was the size of a playing card. Today, it's as small as a thumbnail.

Recreational handheld GPS devices, which first sold for \$3,000, now sell for as low as \$150, though they are not as precise as the \$10,000 advanced systems for professional surveyors.

All GPS devices have become less cumbersome and more accurate.

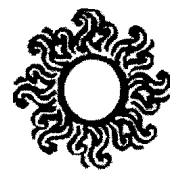
For instance, several years ago, navigation systems would take a while to cue up a location. Drivers could be traveling five minutes in the wrong direction before the system would alert them to the mistake. Some would even tell motorists to make a U-turn on the highway if they missed an exit.

Another factor for GPS growth: a government "E911" mandate requiring wireless carriers to offer services pinpointing the locations of 911 cellular phone calls.

Companies such as Enuvis Inc. are working to improve GPS so receivers could work well indoors and in so-called urban canyons — downtown areas with tall buildings that have long acted as barriers for GPS signals.

"We imagine a world one day where you'll never lose anything and nothing will ever be lost," said Michael Kim, president of Enuvis.

Not everyone is as optimistic. "There are a lot of novel uses for GPS and everyone wants to put them on every Alzheimer's patient," said Will Strauss, a principal analyst with Forward Concepts. "But whether it'll be a lucrative market remains an open question. Will people pay for a device and service to find Aunt Wilma?"



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NATIONAL

Federal employees owe more than \$2.5 billion in taxes

BY CURT ANDERSON
AP Tax Writer

WASHINGTON — Federal employees and retirees owe more than \$2.5 billion in back taxes but actually are more conscientious taxpayers than Americans overall, the Internal Revenue Service says.

As of October 2001, just over 2.8 percent of federal employees and retirees, or about 244,000, had balances due on past income taxes but had not agreed to an installment plan with the IRS.

For the population as a whole, that percentage was 5.2 percent. Still, IRS Commissioner Charles Rossotti says tax delinquency at any level by federal workers is cause for concern.

"If the public perceives that federal employees do not maintain the highest level of tax compliance, public confidence in government will suffer," Rossotti said in a letter to each federal agency head detailing that department's noncompliance rate.

The data, compiled by the IRS annually since 1993 and to be released next week, includes Congress, the White House, the Cabinet departments, courts and independent agencies.

In all, 381,500 federal employees or retirees out of almost 8.7 million were behind on their taxes. About 11.5 million of an estimated 177.5 million taxpayers nationwide owed \$28.2 billion.

Those totals included about 2.3 million taxpayers who were paying off \$8.6 billion in unpaid taxes through monthly installment agreements. About 137,000

federal employees were paying off \$608.6 million that way.

It is the noncompliance rate for those who are not trying to pay off their tax bills that draws the most scrutiny.

On Capitol Hill, the House had a noncompliance rate of over 4 percent, compared with almost 3.5 percent for the Senate. These rates can include both members of Congress and their staffs, although the IRS is not permitted to disclose names of any individuals listed in the report.

The Executive Office of the President had a noncompliance rate of 3.4 percent. The Education Department and Department of Housing and Urban Development both were above 4 percent, highest among Cabinet agencies.

The Defense Department had by far the biggest outstanding tax bill at \$205.6 million. In addition, more than 110,000 retired military personnel owed more than \$1 billion, including those who had installment agreements to pay off their bills.

The Treasury Department, which includes the IRS, had the lowest noncompliance rate among Cabinet agencies at 1.5 percent. Even lower was the FBI had 1.4 percent, with 812 individuals owing about \$3.5 million.

The rate for the CIA was not available because its total number of employees is classified, but intelligence agency did have 304 individuals who owed more than \$2 million.

The National Security Agency, whose employee totals are also classified, had 450 employees owing \$2.3 million.

Man holed up in house for 2-plus years arrested

BY DAVID GRAM
Associated Press Writer

MONTPELIER, Vt. — A man who had holed up in his remote house for 2 1/2 years after a bank foreclosed on it, defying authorities who worried about a possible violent confrontation, was arrested early Sunday on one of his rare excursions off the property.

Aaron Powell, 45, of Lunenburg, was arrested after his release from a hospital in Lancaster, N.H., where he went for treatment of bites from one of the dogs he allegedly trained to attack law officers, said Essex County State's Attorney Vincent Illuzzi.

Powell was being held in lieu of \$2,000 bail in Colebrook, N.H., pending an extradition hearing.

The arrest ended a standoff that started in the summer of 1999, when the Siwooganock Bank of Lancaster foreclosed on Powell's house and 95 acres of land overlooking the Connecticut River valley. Powell had been making mortgage payments to the bank but refused to pay property taxes, which the bank had been paying instead.

Essex County Sheriff Amos Colby said Powell was considered a threat because he had been communicating with right-wing extremist groups such as the Montana Freeman, who engaged in a nearly three-month standoff with the FBI in 1996.

Colby said Powell also regarded as a hero Carl Drega of nearby Columbia, N.H.,

who killed two officers, a judge and a newspaper editor. Drega died in a shootout with police later the same day in 1997.

Illuzzi said state police had found two guns on the property by midday Sunday.

In an Associated Press interview in 2000, Powell had refused to say if he was armed, because "it could be an excuse for foreign agents (government authorities) to come onto my land. They are nothing but gangsters to me."

During the standoff, police were not constantly stationed outside Powell's property.

But until Sunday, he had left the property only occasionally and furtively. The rest of the time, a loose network of supporters delivered food and helped him meet other needs.

He had one felony conviction, for escaping from a state police barracks after a domestic dispute.

Colby had refused to carry out the eviction requested by the bank and the bank sued him. The lawsuit was still pending when Powell was arrested Sunday.

Illuzzi criticized the bank for its aggressive stance, saying it could have added the property taxes to the balance due on the mortgage note, rather than foreclosing and demanding that police storm the property.

State police said they removed four children from Powell's property Sunday, two of them neighbors and two of the children Powell's. They also arrested a friend of Powell's, Deborah Beaton, for trespassing.

INTERNATIONAL



A warm welcome



Ricardo Mazalan/Associated Press
Children wave U.S. and Salvadoran flags to celebrate the arrival of President Bush at the Comalapa airport in San Salvador on Sunday.

al-Qaida still capable of terrorist operations

BY PAMELA SAMPSON

Associated Press Writer

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — Despite battlefield losses suffered against U.S.-led forces in Afghanistan, the al-Qaida network of Osama bin Laden remains capable of carrying out terrorist acts, a U.S. military spokesman said Sunday.

Navy Cmdr. Frank Merriman, a U.S. Central Command spokesman, said the U.S.-led military campaign in Afghanistan has scored significant victories against al-Qaida but that the global terrorist organization is far from being wiped out. Pockets of enemy fighters are believed to be hiding in Afghanistan and Pakistan, waiting for the right moment to strike.

"Central Command would never say al-Qaida and the Taliban have lost their effectiveness," Merriman said. "They are a worldwide organization. There very well may be other terrorist acts in the planning process, and our goal is to try to disturb and eliminate as many of those as we can."

An indication the terrorist threat still exists was underscored Friday, when the State Department ordered families and nonessential diplomatic workers at the U.S. Embassy and consulates in Pakistan to leave the country.

The departure order came less than a week after two Americans were killed in a grenade attack at a church in Islamabad, the capital, and just as 11 people were charged in a Pakistani

court in the kidnapping and murder of Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl.

U.S. military officials have dismissed claims that many al-Qaida fighters managed to escape during Operation Anaconda, the biggest ground offensive in the five-month war that ended this month.

However, Taliban leaders and others familiar with the Islamic movement say as many as 1,000 Taliban and al-Qaida fighters who escaped from Afghanistan are hiding in lawless regions of Pakistan and are planning a comeback in Afghanistan. Others are believed still inside Afghanistan.

U.S. military and intelligence officials say al-Qaida and Taliban fighters in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province, near the Afghan border, are expected to step up activity in the spring as weather improves.

Taliban officials have recently told The Associated Press that bands of al-Qaida and Taliban are on the move, traveling secretly through the mountains linking the southern and central Afghan provinces of Uruzgan, Ghor, Bamiyan, Ghanzi and Zabul.

Merriman said Operation Anaconda dealt a serious blow to the ability of enemy fighters in eastern Afghanistan to plan and carry out operations.

"But they remain a dangerous foe," he said. "That is why we are committed to remaining in the country until we can identify and eradicate as many pockets as we can find."

Former drug kingpin held; underground drug tunnel to be destroyed

The Associated Press

MEXICO CITY — A former Mexican drug kingpin is being held over for trial and the sophisticated border drug tunnel his organization allegedly used to smuggle cocaine and marijuana will be destroyed early next month, authorities announced Sunday.

A judge ordered a trial for Benjamin Arellano Felix, considered to be the leader of one of Mexico's most powerful and violent drug organizations, the Justice Department said in a news release.

Arellano Felix faces charges of participating in organized crime and trafficking drugs. His capture March 9 was hailed by drug experts in Mexico and the United States.

His brother, Ramon Felix,

alleged enforcer of the gang, was killed Feb. 10 in a shootout with police.

Meanwhile, federal agents have studied the construction of the drug tunnel allegedly used by the organization and ordered it destroyed on April 3, the Justice Department release said.

U.S. and Mexican investigators discovered the tunnel last month. The 4-foot-wide, 4-foot-high, 1,300-foot-long tunnel ran from a private home in the mountains east of San Diego to a house in Tecate, a border city in western Baja California state.

Authorities on both sides of the border say Manuel Herrera Barraza — arrested by Mexican authorities this month — used the tunnel to smuggle narcotics into the United States for the Arellano Felixes.

BY CELEAN JACOBSON

Associated Press Writer

JERUSALEM — About 1,000 pilgrims retraced the steps of Jesus to the Old City of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, a small fraction of the usual number and a reflection of the effects of 18 months of Palestinian-Israeli violence.

For the first time Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey joined the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Michel Sabbah, and pilgrims in the hike down the Mount of Olives and up to the walled Old City. This year the procession was called a "Walk for Peace," and Carey's participation was designed as a sign of support for ongoing efforts between Israel and the Palestinians to reach a cease-fire.

The procession follows a path said to have been taken by Jesus when he entered Jerusalem before his arrest, trial and crucifixion by the Roman rulers. In previous years thousands of Christian pilgrims and tourists have thronged the narrow cobbled streets, waving palm fronds and singing hymns.

Those who participated Sunday said they were not frightened.

"I have seen World War Two. I am not scared," said Arthur Betheke, who came with his wife, Mildred, from Alaska for Easter.

"You cannot be faint-hearted. You have to stand up for what you believe in," he said.

"In the Philippines, Palm Sunday is very festive, and I wanted to experience it in Jerusalem like Jesus would have."

— SISTER EMILINA VILLEGAS

Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

Many of the marchers were foreign workers from the Philippines and Romania. Sister Emilina Villegas, from the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Manila said taking part in the procession was a dream come true.

"In the Philippines, Palm Sunday is very festive, and I wanted to experience it in Jerusalem like Jesus would have," she said. "I am also here to show solidarity with the people of this country who want peace."

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- ACROSS**
- 1 Surgery reminder
 - 5 Like some sneakers
 - 10 Enormous
 - 11 Entertains
 - 13 Beame and Burrows
 - 14 Be a snitch
 - 15 Sleeveless cloaks
 - 17 Juan Peron's wife
 - 18 Involves
 - 19 Little lie
 - 20 Actor Scheider
 - 21 Wind indicator
 - 22 Popular ski resort
 - 25 Door part
 - 26 Director Ephron
 - 27 Used a chair
 - 28 "— little teapot"
 - 29 Was good
 - 33 Husband, e.g.
 - 34 Scrutinize
 - 35 "Little Women" writer
 - 37 Some nest eggs
 - 38 Deceived
 - 39 Bottle part
 - 40 Shake-spearean forest
- DOWN**
- 1 Ignominy
 - 2 Castro, for one
 - 3 Actor's representative
 - 4 Highway stop
 - 5 In recent time
 - 6 Stockpile
 - 7 Director's cry
 - 8 Singer Gloria
 - 9 Digging
 - 12 Navy builder
 - 16 Pride member
 - 21 Orange juice ingredient
 - 22 Beast
 - 23 Neighbor of Ethiopia
 - 24 One of Santa's team
 - 25 Joke reaction
 - 27 Church officer
 - 29 Singer Midler
 - 30 Insect-eating bird
 - 31 Make law
 - 32 Class-room fixtures
 - 36 Peculiar

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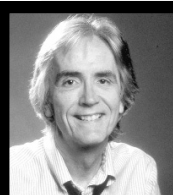
Saturday's answer

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3-25

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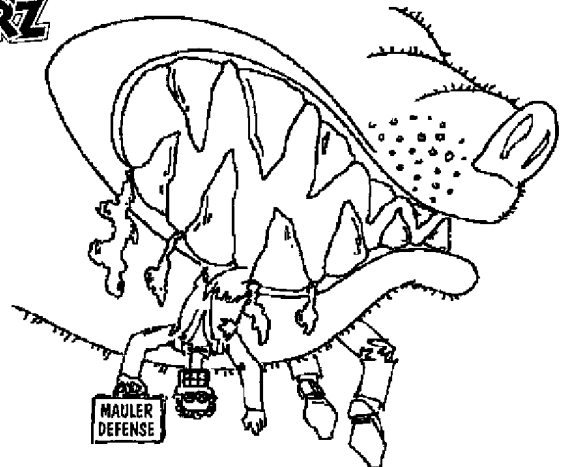
NEWS OF THE WEIRD

by Chuck Shepard

Who said good things come to those who wait?

Rod Yellon, a political science professor at the University of Manitoba, was fined in February for protesting a postponement of the trial in his four-year-long constitutional challenge over a \$25 (U.S.) traffic ticket he had been issued in Winnipeg for rolling through a stop sign. Yellon had challenged the law as too vague, in that a "stop" sign did not "specify sufficiently" what drivers were supposed to do when they encountered one.

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BACK PAGE

Maggots born in comatose patients' nostrils at hospital

BY JOSH FREED
Associated Press Writer

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Maggots were born in the noses of two comatose patients four years ago at a city Veteran's Administration hospital infested by mice and flies, according to a medical journal report released Monday.

The story in the Archives of Internal Medicine details the 1998 infestation. It said mice would sometimes dash over the feet of employees in the hospital director's suite.

Hospital officials said the hospital no longer has any cleanliness problems. Barbara Shatto, the hospital's quality manager, said the hospital scored 99 out of 100 when it was inspected by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospital Organizations in October.

"We learned from that incident and took action to

make sure it doesn't happen again," said Pat Landon, the hospital's director of facilities.

The infestation started with a housecleaning oversight, according to the article.

Dr. Stephen Klotz, then the hospital's chief of infectious disease, said the mice moved in after the cafeteria and food storage areas were dropped from a cleaning list. Some areas weren't cleaned for at least a year, according to the article.

By July 1998, a pest control contractor put out bait and glue boards to kill the mice.

Inspectors later found dead mice in food storage rooms, mouse nests behind boxes on food shelves, and mouse droppings on the floor of a cafeteria work room. Live mice were found in a large wastebasket.

Cleaners missed some of the dead mice, which attracted

flies. Green blowflies like to lay their eggs in dead mice.

Electronic fly-control devices were installed, and pest-control workers began using live traps for the mice.

Some of the flies flew into the hospital's intensive-care unit, where they were trapped by automatic doors and kept away from mouse carcasses.

Maggots were found in the nostrils of one patient on July 22, 1998, the article said. Maggots were found in the nose of a second patient on Sept. 30, 1998.

Klotz said the maggots were removed immediately and that neither patient was harmed by the infestation. The first patient died two days after the maggots were found but the cause of death was unrelated.

"They're ghastly," her said, "but they're harmless."

Klotz said he found a few other examples where flies laid eggs in patients at other hospitals.

Over-50 women's group paints town red in Ventura

By The Associated Press

VENTURA — It was an invasion of scarlet women dubbed the "Red Hat Hoot."

About 600 women dressed in red hats and purple clothing swarmed into town Saturday to celebrate the concept that growing old gracefully means kicking up your heels.

They were members of the Red Hat Society, which started a year ago in Orange County and has grown to about 2,600 chapters around the country with as many as 60,000 members.

The orgy of tea parties, shopping and general goofing-off was the idea of group founder and "Queen Mother" Sue Ellen Cooper.

"Why not?" she said. "We deserve to

take the train somewhere and shop all day if we want to. The sky won't fall."

The red hats ranged from a silk turban to a baseball cap to concoctions of lace, feathers, sequins or Easter eggs.

Several hundred members took the Amtrak train from Irvine. But Linda Hardaway and three friends drove 23 hours nonstop from Houston.

"We take things seriously in Texas," she said.

Cooper inadvertently launched the group in her Fullerton home about a year ago when she began giving red hats to her over-50 friends on their birthdays, along with copies of a 1961 poem called "Warning" by British poet Jenny Joseph. In it, a middle-aged woman warns that she is going to "make up for the sobriety of my youth."

"I shall wear purple," she vows, "with a red hat which doesn't go and doesn't suit me."

The group spread by word of mouth and an Internet site.

There aren't any officers, dues, fundraisers or agendas. Women under 50 can be join but must wear pink hats.

The only other rule: have fun. One Red Hat chapter played laser tag.

"People thank me all the time for giving them the permission to play again," Cooper said.

Nancy Spranger, a nurse in Modesto, said her group is thinking of renting a limousine and having an opera night in San Francisco.

"I've worked since I was 15," she said. "I was a single parent and raised three teen-agers. Now it's time for me."

Her 82-year-old mother has even worn her Red Hat garb to church.

"It was like watching a bird in the front yard puff up," Spranger said. "It just changed her whole outlook — like, 'Yessss! I'm somebody!'"

At least five members have been buried in their red hats.

The group's first national convention will be held April 18-21 in Chicago.

"We've reached critical mass," said Karen Timmermann, a member of the Santa Ana chapter called the Whooping Crones. "All these women together. There's power."

"Who is that internal person saying you're too old or shouldn't want to have fun?" asked "Queen Mother" Cooper. "That inner voice is lying to you."

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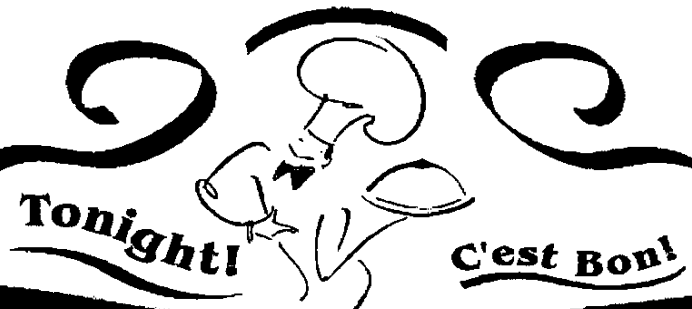
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