

FREE

FRIDAY, APRIL 18, 2003

Volume 2, Issue 134

Santa Monica Daily Press

A newspaper with issues

LOTTTO

FANTASY 5

02, 11, 24, 31, 38

DAILY 3

Afternoon picks: 8, 3, 4

Evening picks: 4, 3, 6

DAILY DERBY

1st Place: 11, Money Bags

2nd Place: 04, Big Ben

3rd Place: 06, Whirl Win

Race time: 1:42.92



NEWS OF THE WEIRD
by Chuck Shepard

News of the Weird from time to time reports on the vile, anti-homosexuality crusades of the indefatigable Rev. Fred Phelps (Westboro Baptist Church, Topeka, Kan.) and his extended family. The latest: The clan planned to be in Pittsburgh on April 13 to picket several organizations that had been associated with the late Fred Rogers, whom the Phelps believe led kids in "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" to feel that being gay was acceptable. Said one of Phelps' daughters (a Westboro attorney): "This country has forgotten God and effectively flipped Him off, and Fred Rogers is in part responsible." (At a November demonstration at the University of Maryland, the Phelps carried the sign, "Thank God for Sept. 11," an event which they view as proof of God's wrath.)



THOUGHT OF THE DAY

Like all self-made men
he worships his creator.



INDEX



Horoscopes

Speak creatively, Leo 2



Local

Santa Monica surf report ..3



Opinion

Rein-in budget deficit 4



State

Inland counties growing ..6



National

Dr. Atkins dies 9



International

Playing cop in Baghdad ..10



Sports

Lakers ready for 4-peat ..11



Classifieds

\$3.50 a day 13



Calendar

Movie listings 15



Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press

A Santa Monica Police detective interviews a witness outside of Wells Fargo on Thursday shortly after a man, armed with a rifle, robbed the bank.

Wells Fargo Bank robbed by gunman

Bank robbery numbers
this year are already
higher than last year

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON
Daily Press Staff Writer

Santa Monica Police on Thursday arrested a man minutes after he allegedly robbed Wells Fargo Bank on Wilshire Boulevard at gunpoint.

It was the fifth bank robbery in Santa Monica this year, which is already one more than all of 2002.

Calvin Tyrone Combs, a 36-year-old transient, was stopped at gunpoint by several SMPD officers at 21st Street and Wilshire Boulevard after he allegedly pointed a rifle at a Wells Fargo bank teller, demanded money and fled on foot with more than \$1,000, sources said.

The following Santa Monica banks have been robbed this year:

■ Jan. 14 — US Bank, 1401 Wilshire Blvd.

■ Feb. 11 — First Federal Bank, 1630 Montana Ave. The bank also was robbed last October.

■ Feb. 19 — US Bank, 400 Wilshire Blvd.

■ April 11 — US Bank, 2221 Santa Monica Blvd.

■ April 17 — Wells Fargo, 2444 Wilshire Blvd.

Witnesses said Combs walked into the bank, located on Chelsea Avenue and Wilshire Boulevard, about 10:30 a.m. After he left, he allegedly dumped the rifle in a trash

See ROBBERY, page 7

School funding woes 'unconscionable'

Situation bad even if parcel tax passes, superintendent says

BY JOHN DEASY
Daily Press Staff Writer

There's no good news when it comes to the Santa Monica school district's finances, said Superintendent John Deasy.

"If all of this comes to pass, we will have written off a generation of kids," Deasy said in an interview earlier this week. "I find this unconscionable."

Because state funding is drying up, Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District has been forced to slash more than 200 positions, along with a host of programs and services.

Schools across the state are



JOHN DEASY

shouldering a portion of California's \$34 billion budget deficit.

The 12,700-student SMMUSD is short of its usual \$65 million budget by at least \$13 million next year.

See DEASY, page 8

Wrongful-death claim against Lee rejected

By The Associated Press

A Santa Monica jury Thursday rejected a wrongful-death claim against musician Tommy Lee for the drowning of a little boy during a children's birthday party at his home.

The Superior Court jury of nine women and three men met for just less than three hours before returning the unanimous verdict in the lawsuit over the

death of 4-year-old Daniel Karven-Veres.

"Although I am relieved that the court has found me not negligent, there are no winners in this sad situation," Lee said in a statement issued after the decision.

The victim's parents, actress Ursula Karven and TV producer James Veres, sued Lee for wrongful death, accusing him of negligence for failing to have a

See LEE, page 8

Bechtel wins big Iraq reconstruction contract

BY LARRY MARGASAK
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — The government awarded Bechtel Corp. a contract on Thursday that could reach \$680 million to help rebuild Iraq, including the nation's power, water and sewage systems.

The U.S. Agency for International Development said

the initial contract was for \$34.6 million but it could be worth the larger figure over 18 months, subject to congressional approval.

Several Democratic lawmakers have complained the Bush administration did not allow open competitive bidding, but rather invited a small number of firms to submit proposals. USAID has defended the

See WAR, page 10



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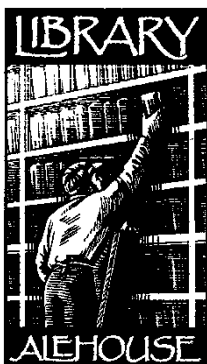
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★★★★★-Dynamic ★★★★★-Positive ★★★-Average
★★-So-so ★-Difficult

HAPPY BIRTHDAY for Friday, April 18, 2003:

You make peace by using your instinctive understanding of others and their needs. You have an unusually high career drive. Knowing what you want could make a big difference, but you still need to use your instincts with higher-ups. You will gain professionally from September on. Your abilities take you down a unique path this year. Travel and/or education plays a significant role in your year. If single, wave goodbye to that status, as you will meet someone quite special. You will have an interesting decision to make. If attached, your relationship will flourish if you express your feelings more often. SAGITTARIUS helps you detach.

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

★★★★★ Others reach out to you. The unexpected occurs when you try to communicate with a friend. People don't need to agree with you, but it would be nice. Your strong drive heads you in a new direction. Be more in touch with your feelings. Tonight: Try a new spot. Do something unusual.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

★★★★★ Finally, others seek you out with pleasant news. Bosses express their quirkiness. Explain what is necessary, tuning in to your diplomacy. You just might want to put the "Gone Fishing" sign on your door. Tonight: For you and a dear friend.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20)

★★★★★ Realize your possibilities without shutting doors. You might be somewhat off in your decisions and thoughts, especially those surrounding a new purchase. Face it: You want what you want. Perhaps clearer communication will help those around you. Tonight: Accept one of your many invitations. It's the weekend!

CANCER (June 21-July 22)

★★★★★ Realize when to say "no." An associate or partner could be pushed beyond his or her natural limits. Your desirability emerges when you are just yourself. Understand that others might not be on the same page as you. Make that OK. Tonight: Why not a night just for yourself?

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)

★★★★★ The basics count. Others have an interesting way of chiming in and letting their point be known. Still, a partner has ideas that, if used, could get a project off the ground. The unexpected occurs when dealing with others. Let your creativity speak. Tonight: You're coming from a point of security.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

★★★★★ Speak your mind. Others tend to listen to your suggestions. Resistance dissolves right in front of you. Reach out to a loved one; brainstorm about plans — be it work or weekend plans. A boss or co-worker could throw a boomerang into your plans. Tonight: Relax at home.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)

★★★★★ Indulge yourself for a change. Say what you feel. An associate agrees with and supports your ideas. You might feel challenged. Delegate. Let others handle present pressures. Play Ralph Nader when making a major purchase. Tonight: Ask, and you shall receive.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)

★★★★★ You can push, and you will get results. The question remains, just how far do you want to go to achieve the goals you desire? A loved one might be touchy. You could discover at the last minute that there is a major adjustment at hand. Tonight: Your treat.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

★★★★★ You might not agree with what others say, but you do need to listen. In fact, you could be shocked by what you hear. Notice more of what others want. Don't resist spending money on a purchase for your home or family. Add to the quality of your life. Tonight: Let spontaneity speak.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

★★★★★ Reach out for those in your immediate environment. You find that a partner or associate will test your limits. If you smile and choose your words with care, you'll get the response you desire. Think before you answer. You pull the wild card financially. Tonight: Get some extra zzz's.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

★★★★★ Honor a boss's request, and you'll gain financially. You need to know when you have run into a problem. Your ability to intuit an authority figure's needs proves key. Your fire makes a difference in getting the job done. Be careful how you express strong feelings. Tonight: Where your friends are.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)

★★★★★ You might not be sure what is the best way to proceed. A big smile goes quite far in winning over others. Push for what you want. Give up being so discreet. Bring others together as a team. Co-workers and friends mix later in the day. Tonight: A must appearance.

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1427 Third Street Promenade, Suite #202 • Santa Monica, CA 90401

PUBLISHER

Ross Furukawa ross@smdp.com

EDITOR

Carolyn Sackarason sack@smdp.com

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Jason Auslander jason@smdp.com

STAFF WRITER

John Wood wood@smdp.com

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Del Pastrana del@smdp.com

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

Alejandro C. Cantarero alex@smdp.com

CLASSIFIED REPRESENTATIVE

Mitch Troy mitch@smdp.com

CLASSIFIED REPRESENTATIVE

Angela Downen angela@smdp.com

CLASSIFIED REPRESENTATIVE

Paula Christensen paula@smdp.com

ADVERTISING ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE

William Patnosh william@smdp.com

ADVERTISING ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE

Rob Piubeni rob@smdp.com

ADVERTISING ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE

Keri Aroesty keri@smdp.com

CIRCULATION MANAGER

Robert Deamicis Rob@smdp.com

CIRCULATION

Kiutzu Cruz kiutzu@smdp.com

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Dave Danforth dave@smdp.com

STAFF MASCOT

Maya Furukawa ross@smdp.com

LOCAL

Elderly man hit by car

By Daily Press staff

An elderly man is listed serious condition after a motorist hit him while he was walking through the intersection of Santa Monica Boulevard and 23rd Street on Wednesday.

The 85-year-old Pacific Palisades resident was walking east on 23rd Street in a crosswalk when a motorist traveling south

on 23rd Street stopped for a red light at Santa Monica Boulevard. When west-bound traffic cleared, the motorist accelerated and hit the man.

The victim's injuries were unknown Thursday. The motorist was interviewed and released. Santa Monica Police are investigating the accident.

COMMUNITY BRIEF

Earth Day to be celebrated at Palisades Park

By Daily Press staff

Local Santa Monica peace activists Jerry and Marissa Rubin invite the greater Santa Monica community to help re-dedicate and decorate a tree at Palisades Park on Earth Day, which is Tuesday.

The Children's Tree of Life, located in the park at the intersection of Ocean Avenue and Colorado Boulevard, was originally planted April 22, 1983 and later proclaimed a "living monument to world peace" by the late Santa Monica Mayor Ken Edwards.

The tree has been re-planted three times — twice because of vandals and once because of a maintenance vehicle accident, Rubin said in a press release.

The 20th Anniversary Rededication Ceremony will take place at 3 p.m. The tree — a New Zealand Christmas Tree — will be decorated with peace and environmental symbols.

The Rubins not only planted the tree initially, but also were married next to it in a "Public Peace Rally Wedding" on June 12, 1983.

For more information, call 310-399-1000.

surf report

Information compiled by Jesse Haley

On Friday, southwest swell will peak as northwest wind swell adds to the mix.

Today will be the best day to get your sessions in before swell starts to taper off during the weekend. Expect waist-to-chest-high at good exposures, with Malibu doing okay, as well as possibilities at Zero's and Dume.

Saturday swell will back off and surf should lose size. Most breaks hit around waist high.

Unfortunately, nothing new is expected Sunday so waves will likely see another decrease in height.

Water is a bit cleaner compared to earlier this week and should continue to improve as long as we don't get any more rain.

Today's Tides:

Low- 5:21 a.m. -1.16'
High- 11:36 a.m. 4.15'
Low- 4:54 p.m. 1.21'
High- 11:06 p.m. 6.11'

Location	Friday	Saturday	Water Quality
County Line	3-4'/Fair	2-3'/Fair	NA
Zuma	3-4'/Fair	2-3'/Fair	NA
Surfrider	1-3'/Fair	1-3'/Fair	NA
Topanga	2-3'/Fair	2-3'/Fair	NA
Breakwater	3-4'/Fair	3-4'/Fair	NA
El Porto	3-5'/Fair	3-4'/Fair	NA

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OPINION

LETTERS

Not buying Springer's argument

Editor:

(This letter was originally addressed to SMDP columnist Charles Springer, who appears on Mondays.)

I have to say that with some of your previous columns, you almost won me over. However, with this latest column of April 15, you cast the last deadly blow against yourself in my eyes.

First, let me say, that rather than this country allowing these women to be homeless, it is they who are choosing it. They have freedom of choice, which means that if they really wanted to, they, perhaps with much-needed help, could get off the streets. "The very people who gave all of us life, are living on the streets?" How can you make such a generalization?

Suddenly, you see some homeless women walking by and you make them into martyrs from whom we all have sprung, been given life. Heaven help us all if that were the case.

We are not treating women this way. They are treating themselves this way. To make a comparison between homeless women in this country and the way that "women are treated in Afghanistan under the Taliban or in Iraq under Saddam's regime," is ludicrous. These homeless women here have rights, which they are not exercising, while those other women to whom you refer have virtually no rights.

I am sorry, I just don't buy it. Give me a break!

Julia Reeves
Santa Monica

Remember North Korea

Editor:

President Bush will probably go after Syria next, or maybe Iran.. Lest we forget North Korea. If North Korea wants talks, Bush no doubt won't agree to bilateral talks. But he should remember, North Korea is a country, whether he likes it or not. They have territory, armed forces, and probably have nuclear weapons as well. If North Korea wants to talk, it can't hurt to listen. It isn't some nonexistent country like Atlantis. Besides, if Bush recognizes North Korea, that will give him an excuse to have another war to divert people's attention away from the way he has ruined the economy.

Mike Kirwan
Venice

Don't make seders political

Editor:

I was very disappointed to hear that living wage activists chose the Jewish holy ceremony of the Passover seder to organize their next political campaign. One of the most

solemn observances in the Jewish religion, Passover is a time for Jews to tell the story of our exodus from slavery in Egypt to our children, to pass down through the generations.

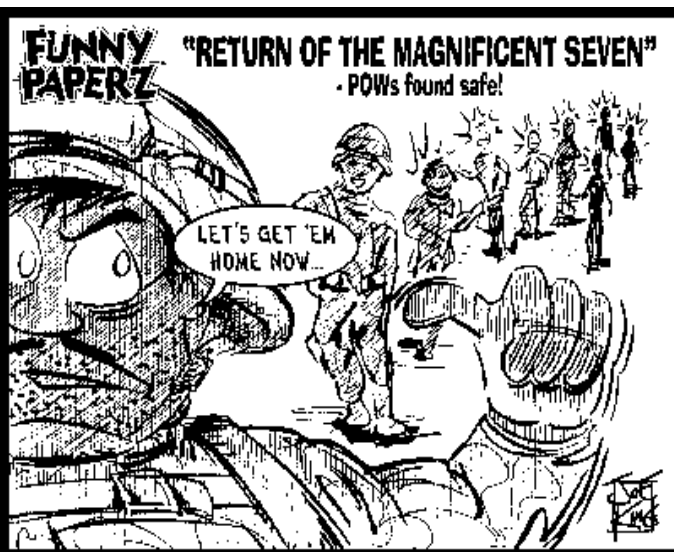
It is not a time for political organizing or campaigning.

How would worshippers feel if I brought a group of pro-choice friends to an Easter mass on Sunday and turned it into a rally? Catholics would rightly be as insulted as I was upon hearing that the Passover seder was corrupted into a political organizing tool.

I frequently invite non-Jews to the Passover seder so that they may share this very special part of Jewish history with us. And part of the Jewish culture is to help those less fortunate. But don't force kids to become unwitting political activists under the guise of religion — don't we call that religious extremism in other parts of the world?

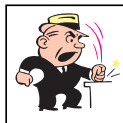
The rabbis who attended this event owe their congregants an apology. It's fine to have an interfaith meeting at a local church to discuss the living wage issue. Just don't call it a seder.

Evelyn Jerome
Santa Monica



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City budget deficit: Grab yer undies and hold tight



**MY
WRITE**
By Bill Bauer

Holy cow! Everything's going into the crapper!

Just check the local news.

Tuesday's Los Angeles Times featured an article about the \$800-million County of Los Angeles budget gap. Cuts will run wide and deep, affecting virtually every county service.

The State of California is already \$33 billion in the hole. The state's prison guards might not get their raises this year.

The federal government is also running a deficit in the hundreds of billions of dollars, thanks in most part to Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District administrators are predicting a deficit of \$13 million next year. They blame it on cuts in state education funds. However, the usual \$2 million to \$3.5 million shortfall the district runs every year (the one that the Santa Monica City Council bails 'em out on every June) is also a contributor.

The City of Santa Monica itself is facing a \$12 million deficit — and that could go higher even if the City Council doesn't approve a couple of million dollars extra this year to help the schools.

The City of Santa Monica is considering across the board 5 percent cuts in all city operating budgets except for police and fire. The Daily Press reported last week that layoffs of city employees are inevitable.

The city is also increasing parking rates, citation fines and is looking at raising new taxes and increasing existing taxes and fees — including the onerous sales tax.

Between a likely 1 percent increase in the sales tax on the state level and if Santa Monica tacks on its own 1/4- or 1/2-percent, we could be paying a 10 percent sales tax within two years.

Now the feds are thinking of making Internet sales subject to various state sales taxes, too. Ouch!

I have some suggestions where spending could be cut.

Over the last year or two, the city has spent millions of dollars acquiring properties for affordable housing. A partial listing of recent acquisitions includes Main and Pacific, purchased for almost \$3.2 million; 1942/1950 High Place obtained for over \$4 million; 1424 Broadway purchased for

\$2.5 million and, most recently, the Jewish Center at 2601 Santa Monica Boulevard, bought for \$3.25 million.

Additional millions have also been allocated to cover closing costs, development fees, demolition, architect fees and other expenses, not including construction costs.

Another place I'd cut is support for the numerous boards, commissions and neighborhood groups.

Take the Bayside District Corp., for example.

The BDC is a non-profit, city-sponsored entity whose mission is to encourage business downtown. It has a nearly \$1 million yearly budget, \$608,000 of which is a direct city subsidy, plus another \$200,000 allocated for Promenade maintenance.

According to the OceanParkGazette.org, BDC Executive Director Kathleen Rawson recently authorized pay raises for herself and the staff. Her annual salary alone is around \$100,000.

Is Rawson's raise representative of others the city might be quietly approving, despite talk about making cuts?

Last Feb. 25, Santa Monica Redevelopment Agency (i.e. City Council) approved reclassification of 40 city employees to higher job level titles and higher pay. I guess it's one way of giving raises without giving raises.

Ten agencies receive about \$1.9 million from the city to provide services to Santa Monica's homeless. This is just the tip of the iceberg because our large transient population costs the city millions of dollars more in police, fire, paramedic and other hidden city services and resources.

How about the \$72 million cost — which is sure to increase — of the new Main Library and adjacent parking structure? And millions are being wasted for traffic calming projects including traffic islands the length of Wilshire Boulevard. The Civic Auditorium and the Santa Monica Pier are also million-dollar drains on the city.

Will our spendthrift City Council will make the right choices this June when the next fiscal year's budget is hammered out? Will Council members think "resident" and step up to support the schools? They need to re-prioritize and think "lifeboat economics" but somehow, I don't think that will happen.

Smart money says their pet pork will come out unscathed while higher taxes and reduced services to residents will be the order of the day.

We all better grab our underwear and hold on tight

(Bill Bauer is a longtime Santa Monica resident and freelance writer.)

OPINION

The QLine

Readers sound off on universal healthcare question

This week, Q-line asked:

"Do you support a universal health plan in the state? Should every Californian be entitled to health insurance?"

Here are your responses:

■ "I assume that when you say 'every Californian' that you're including illegal immigrants for this health care. I don't think that this health care will go over like a lead balloon. An illegal immigrant is not entitled to all the benefits. They don't pay income taxes. A lot of them work under the table. They are going to raise the income tax by 3 percent. They are going to bankrupt people out of this state. They are going to have a big mess because under this plan, no co-payments, no deductibles and no insurance premiums. People on Medicare are paying co-payments and premiums, so why should people that aren't entitled to live here get free insurance? I would assume that there is some kind of safety net on this that would exclude illegal immigrants. I would hope so, but I sure hope that they don't okay this plan because I think it stinks. Thanks."

■ "Yes, I am very much in support of a universal health plan in this state, and naturally universal would mean all over the United States. I have been for universal health plan since George McGovern first promoted it and then Hillary and Bill Clinton. Lets get back behind Sheila Kuehl. It's a great thing and its time we had it in this country. Thank you so much."

■ "Depends on the cost. No form of insurance is inexpensive. Medicare for senior citizens, backed up with an HMO is very costly and does not cover the purchase of medicine that can cost up to \$100 per pill depending on the spatial potency and purpose of that pill. Any form of universal insurance must be thought out carefully so the policy will fulfill the intended need."

■ "No, I don't support a universal health plan. Not everybody works. Not everybody can afford it. Except for the employees that keep their employees healthy. They should be the ones to provide the health plan coverage."

■ "The question of do state residents deserve universal health care? Absolutely not. Are we entitled to health care? Absolutely not. We are entitled to the opportunity to earn our own money and pay for it. The idea that somehow if you are born in California or America you are entitled to health care or housing or an education — all things need to be earned. If you want an example of bad policy, look at the fact that 30 percent of Medicare and Medicaid is now spent on fraud. Enlarging that process would only lose more dollars. Possibly if we police that better, we would have more money for health care. In America you are entitled to the opportunity to create it for yourself, not for it to be delivered to you. Thank you very much."

■ "The only people that should get health care are those that can afford to pay the doctors' high rates themselves, out of pocket. That insurance is a big hoax designed to give anybody the right to live and receive health care, which is just abominable. If you can't afford to pay for the drugs, the doctors and the equipment then you should move to Scandinavia or some commie country like that."

■ "A universal health plan entitlement in California would have two consequences. One — a whole lot of new Californians, and two — a whole lot of former Californians."

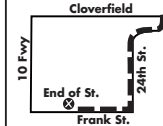
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Santa Monica real estate market remains strong



DAYS ON THE MARKET

By Jodi Summers

Home and income property sales are up. Condo sales are down. Land sales stayed the same...that's what happened with property in Santa Monica in the first three months of 2003.

According to the Multiple Listing Service, a total of 240 Santa Monica properties changed hands – the high seller was a 28-unit apartment building on San Vicente, which went for \$7,500,000. The bargain bottom property was a 2-bedroom/1-bathroom condo near the freeway that went for \$124,900.

Although sales are down a bit from 2002, prices continue to rise. For the first three months of 2002, 247 properties changed hands, the high sale of first quarter 2002 was a single family residence for \$5.5 million the low was a condo for \$48,600.

"Traditionally, the first quarter is not as active as the remainder of the year," said John McIntyre, vice president of Boardwalk Realty. "But because of the low mortgage rates, there seems to be the same activity as last year at this time. As we enter the second quarter, activity is still strong and multiple bidding is a frequent occurrence in the Santa Monica marketplace. If interest rates stay at their current level, we should see this activity continue for the remainder of the year."

California home sales are contrary to the rest of the country. According to the National Association of Realtors, the rate of home purchases fell 8.1 percent in February to the slowest rate since August 2000. The Commerce Department noted that sales were down in every region of the country except the West. The first quarter is traditionally the slowest time of year for home sales. The fact that the country is at war is also keeping people from making property purchase decisions.

"What effect will the invasion of Iraq have on home sales? Not very much over the short term," said Marshall Prentice, president of DataQuick information services, which specializes in real estate news and information. "Some buying activity may get deferred, but that will be temporary and the market will catch up again after a few weeks."

"Long term effects are harder to anticipate. The cost of the war will certainly add to the federal budget deficit which in

turn could bring interest rates up."

Nationally, mortgage and loan applications remained relatively unchanged, but there is a growing skepticism for the real estate market. A recently released International Monetary Fund study, titled "When Bubbles Burst," found housing booms in industrial countries, such as the one experienced in the United States in the last two years, have been followed by busts 40 percent of the time. Housing prices have to decline 14 percent to qualify as a bust. The study stated that "housing price busts were found to occur less frequently than stock market busts in industrial countries, but they tended to last almost twice as long and have greater economic consequences."

"Traditionally, the first quarter is not as active as the remainder of the year."

— JOHN MCINTYRE
Boardwalk Realty

Median home prices in the United States have skyrocketed in the last two years, climbing more than 13 percent, according to National Association of Realtors statistics. Santa Monica residents have watched their real estate market balloon since the city lifted rent control restrictions on January 1, 1999. In many areas around town property prices have more than doubled.

A rise above and beyond the national average has been true throughout Southern California. In Los Angeles, Riverside, San Diego, Ventura, San Bernardino and Orange counties, and in the Southland, prices are continuing to rise. According to DataQuick, in February, a total of 22,516 new and resale houses and condos were sold throughout the region. That's up 0.1 percent from 22,484 properties for February last year.

For the first quarter of this year, the median price that Southland buyers paid for a home was up more than 18.5 percent from 2002. Parts of Santa Monica and much of Venice have seen even greater increases.

(If you have local real estate questions, please e-mail them to Jodi Summers at jodis@boardwalkrealty.com, or call at 310.309.4219.)

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LOCAL



Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press

Santa Monica Police officer David Rinsky hands out SMPD stickers to students from McKinley and Edison elementary schools on Thursday. Rinsky, who was responding to an armed robbery at Wells Fargo Bank, took a minute to greet the students, who happened to be walking by.

Bank robberies on the rise in Santa Monica this year

ROBBERY, from page 1

can and headed west on Wilshire.

SMPD officers, who were in the area, spotted Combs walking on the sidewalk. He was detained and witnesses and bank employees confirmed that Combs was the robber.

He was taken to the Santa Monica Jail, where he was booked for armed bank robbery and felony parole violation. The rifle was recovered from the trash can by SMPD officers.

An unidentified woman said she was sitting in her car parked on Wilshire Boulevard near the intersection with Chelsea Avenue just a few feet west of the bank, when she noticed a man walking down the street with a rifle. He approached her car, looked in the back seat but continued walking.

"I thought, 'I'm in deep doo-doo,'" she said. "You think you panic when you see someone with a rifle but you don't."

On Feb. 19, US Bank on Fourth Street and Wilshire Boulevard was held up. SMPD officers also caught that suspect within minutes of the robbery.

A US Bank employee called police to report that the recently opened branch, located at 400 Wilshire, was being robbed, according to police.

Santa Monica Police officers arrived at the scene in less than two minutes and witnesses pointed out a suspect walking away from a parked car in the 1200 block of Court Four, an alley between Fourth and Fifth streets, police officers said.

Officers detained the man and witnesses later positively identified him as the suspect from the bank robbery, police said.

After the man was arrested, police searched his car and found a replica handgun in a jacket that witnesses told police had allegedly been used during the bank robbery. Officers also recovered a sack of money from the vehicle.

The other robberies occurred Jan. 14 at US Bank, 1401 Wilshire Blvd., Feb. 11 at First Federal Bank, 1630 Montana Ave., and April 11 at 2221 Santa Monica Blvd.

SMPD has arrested two of the suspects

in the robberies, the others remain at large. Details of those robberies were not available from police sources on Thursday.

There were four bank robberies in 2002, FBI officials said. Bank robberies occurred on Sept. 30, Nov. 27 and Dec. 6 and Dec. 7.

Two men held up First Federal Bank on Montana Avenue last September. The suspects entered the bank at 17th Street and Montana Avenue and demanded money from the tellers, according to FBI officials. SMPD officers arrived on the scene first and detectives then called the Los Angeles' FBI bureau, which handles all bank robberies on the westside.

No weapon was ever produced, according to witnesses, but it was classified as a takeover robbery, meaning the suspects told everyone in the bank to get down on the floor.

Sources said the two men held their hands near their sides and inside their pockets, implying that they had a gun. One source said a teller was knocked to the ground by one of the robbers.

Last November, Washington Mutual, located at 2701 Wilshire Boulevard was robbed, but apparently the suspect got anxious and fled through the rear of the bank before the teller could give him the cash.

The man who is believed to have robbed the branch was fatally shot by Las Vegas police on New Year's Eve. Robert James Nusbaum, 34, is believed to be responsible for nearly a dozen bank robberies in Los Angeles and nine in Nevada.

He was shot by Las Vegas Metro Police on Dec. 31 after he and another man allegedly robbed Bank of America and opened fire on authorities when they were found hiding behind a nearby apartment complex, police said.

Nusbaum, known by the FBI as the "Do Jo Bandit" because he wore a karate-type shirt, fired the first shot at officers when he was spotted in the getaway car. Nusbaum struck one police officer in the leg. Two officers fired back and shot Nusbaum. He died of multiple gunshot wounds.

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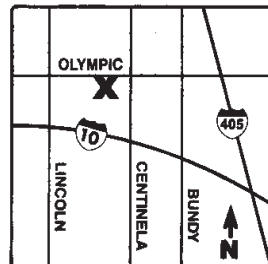
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School officials prepare for parcel tax campaign

DEASY, from page 1

And it's only expected to get worse. Officials estimate the state's deficit will balloon to \$40 billion this summer.

Even if a proposed parcel tax is approved by voters in June, it will be about five years before local schools can again provide the same level of service now being offered, Deasy said.

And any plans to make improvements to the district's curriculum have been shoved aside by administrators struggling to slow the bleeding, he said.

"Anybody that can do the math realizes really quickly there's a chunk of these cuts that is not going to be reinstated," Deasy said.

Deasy, who left a superintendent position in Rhode Island two years ago to take the helm at SMMUSD, said he is hoping for a regime change in Sacramento.

He lambasted the state for spending more on its prisons than its schools. And he said California ranks dead last in public school spending and in staff-to-student ratios.

But not everything is bad in the Golden State, he said.

Deasy said parents in Santa Monica are more involved than those in Rhode Island. He called it a "different culture" and said he's been surprised and gratified by the level of commitment district parents have shown.

Only 11 percent of local parents send their kids to non-public schools. The national average is close to 20 percent, he said.

Inese Verzemnieks, a Samohi mother and Parent Teacher Student Association leader, said parents have donated more than \$100,000 directly to Samohi this year.

Last year, that figure was closer to

"Anybody that can do the math realizes really quickly there's a chunk of these cuts that is not going to be reinstated."

— JOHN DEASY
Superintendent

\$60,000. The year before that it was only about \$40,000, she said.

"It's terrible that we have to pick up these pieces," Verzemnieks said. "But if we don't pay for it now, we're going to pay for it later."

Students and parents have held talent nights, silent auctions, raffles, car washes and gift wrapping events to raise money.

Individual group events — such as the school choir's trip to Boston later this month — have found their own funding, Verzemnieks said.

"You can't deny a child because they can't afford it," she said. "We want these wonderful experiences for our kids, so we're really willing to bust our chops."

Deasy said that ultimately all the money raised will go toward making up for lost programs and positions and therefore not be used to advance the district's offerings.

Still, the district is spearheading a couple of efforts to recoup important positions lost because of the budget constraints.

Most importantly, officials say, is a proposed parcel tax, which will go before voters June 3.

The flat \$225 tax, which would be levied on all properties in Santa Monica

and Malibu, would generate about \$6.5 million annually for the next six years.

Campaigning for the parcel tax will kick into high gear on Monday, Deasy said, as an on-going registration drive is complemented with mailers, phone banking and other efforts.

"It's actually really black and white," Deasy said of Measure S. "The community either wants to return the things that were listed or we don't."

Officials are also asking the cities of Santa Monica and Malibu to increase the amount of money they give to the district. Last year, Santa Monica ramped up its usual \$3 million contribution to \$4.5 million to help the cash-strapped district.

But with the city struggling to close its own deficit, officials are skeptical that any more money will go toward schools.

"Philosophically, everybody wants to help the kids and the schools," said Councilman Herb Katz. "But we're sitting

in a financial difficulty."

Assistant Superintendent Ken Bailey said the district is only counting on \$3 million from Santa Monica and \$15,000 from Malibu for the 2003-2004 school year. Cheri Orgel, president of the local PTA, said school supporters are focused primarily on the parcel tax.

In the end, Deasy said the future of the schools in Santa Monica is in the state's hands.

"It's amazing how impactful this will be to public schools and how little control we have over it," Deasy said.

Despite the economic woes, Deasy said SMMUSD has a lot to be proud of. During his two years at the helm, test scores have risen and the quality of instruction is way up, he said.

Average daily attendance is a whopping 96 percent.

Deasy said the district's innovative approach to a possible budget recovery has earned the praise of state legislators. The district has organized cut positions into "bundles" that will be reinstated as funds become available.

Union leaders have pitched in to carry the district through this difficult economic time, Deasy said.

"I think that's the thing I'm most proud of," he said. "We're doing a really good job of solving this collectively and collaboratively."

Hollywood alters movies to foil camcorder pirates

BY GARY GENTILE
AP Business Writer

LOS ANGELES — Hollywood sends enforcers with night-vision goggles into movie theaters and puts metal detectors outside advance screening rooms, but still the industry can't stop pirates from recording films and selling illegal copies before their theatrical debuts.

The problem is that the pirates are adopting ever more sophisticated technology, using tiny camcorders in purses and digital recorders about the size of a fountain pen.

Some handheld computers "have an attachment that can record up to 122 minutes," said Jeffrey Godsick, executive vice president of marketing at 20th Century Fox. "Well, that's a whole movie in many cases. You can take the attachment and run it through a small hole in a tie or a shirt."

This is big business. The Motion Picture Association of America estimates studios lose more than \$3 billion per year from piracy in various forms. So the movie industry is trying to fight back with a high-tech solution of its own.

Cinea LLC, which created an encryption system for DVDs, and Sarnoff, a technology research firm, are developing a system to modulate the light cast on a movie screen to create a flicker or other patterns that would be picked up by recording devices, making the resulting images unwatchable. The disruptive flickers would be unseen by the human eye in the movie theater.

The "forensic watermark" system is designed to be used with digital projectors, which show movies stored on computer discs rather than traditional 35-millimeter film. Only a small number of the-

aters have digital projectors, although it is expected that most theaters will go digital by the end of the decade.

The research is funded by a \$2 million grant from the Advanced Technology Program of the National Institute of Standards and Technology, a government agency.

The technology takes advantage of the fact that the human eye and camcorders see the world differently. For example, a computer screen constantly refreshes an image, creating bars that travel across the screen. A camcorder picks up those bars, but not the naked eye.

Researchers are mindful that creating too rapid a flicker could trigger seizures in some people. They also discovered that using the flicker to write words across the image, such as "Copy," are not disruptive enough.

"It turns out that text isn't that annoying," said Robert Schumann, Cinea's chief executive. "Also, if it's just a static image, it's easier for the pirates to take out."

This technology would be a major improvement over the industry's current measures of trying to block pirate recorders, including night-vision goggles and metal detectors. Some of the piracy is an inside job: A pirate bribes a projectionist to set up a tripod in the projection booth.

"It is a system that will not stop camcording," said Ken Jacobsen, director of worldwide anti-piracy operations for the Motion Picture Association of America. "The best we can do is try to keep it out of the marketplace before a full domestic release."

Still, the industry knows that whatever technological gains are made over pirates will eventually be thwarted, requiring even more sophisticated countermeasures.

"There is a lot of money in piracy," Jacobsen said, "so it is worth people's efforts to try and defeat security."

Jury: Former Crue drummer Tommy Lee not liable in suit

LEE, from page 1

lifeguard or someone trained in CPR present during a June 16, 2001, birthday party for Lee's son Brandon at his Malibu home.

During closing arguments Wednesday, their lawyer, Thomas Girardi, said \$10 million would be a suitable damage award.

"It would have been so easy for this terrible thing not to take place," Girardi told the jury.

Lee's attorney, James Baratta, said responsibility lay with the boy's parents, who did not accompany him to the party, and two other people who were supposed to look out for Daniel.

Lee testified that he did everything he could to ensure the safety of his son's guests, including requiring that every child who attended have an adult there to supervise them.

The boy's mother testified that she did-

"It would have been so easy for this terrible thing not to take place."

— THOMAS GIRARDI
Plaintiffs' lawyer

n't know there would be swimming at the party, adding that if she had she would have made sure Daniel brought his water wings.

Daniel was sent to the party with a caretaker, a German exchange student who can no longer be located. When the caretaker left early to attend a concert, both sides said, he placed Daniel in the care of a nanny who was there to watch other children.





STATE □ NATIONAL



Census: Inland California counties growing quickly

BY PAUL CHAVEZ AND SANDRA MARQUEZ

Associated Press Writers

LOS ANGELES — Californians are moving farther and farther away from the coast to more affordable inland counties, even if it means lengthy commutes, according to demographers and newly released U.S. Census data.

Placer County, between Sacramento and Lake Tahoe, is the fastest-growing county in the state. Its population increased by 12.1 percent to an estimated 278,509 from April 2000 to July 2002, far outpacing the national growth rate of 2.5 percent over the same period.

By contrast, Los Angeles County, the most populous in the nation with an estimated 9.8 million residents in 2002, grew by only 3 percent over the same period.

California's 10 fastest-growing counties are inland areas once associated with farming, outdoor recreation and retirement living. These counties — in the Riverside-San Bernardino area, the Central Valley and the northern foothills of the Sierra Nevada — are now destined to become important population centers as demand for affordable housing surges.

"California has very high housing prices," said Joel Kotkin, a senior fellow at the Davenport Institute at Pepperdine University. "People are forced further and further away. There are only a few places to go."

Retirees from the San Francisco Bay area and people looking for more affordable housing and a bucolic quality of life are drawn to Placer County in the Sierra foothills, said John Marin, the county's administrative officer.

The fast pace of growth in Placer County — 48 percent between 1990 and 2000 — has had drawbacks as well, with the chief complaints being increased traffic and a shortage of high schools, Marin said.

Growth in the state's inland areas is part of a long-term shift in California's population that started in the

1970s, said Hans Johnson, a demographer with the San Francisco-based Public Policy Institute of California.

"Coastal areas are more expensive, they're filling up and it's harder to build housing," Johnson said. "Inland areas offer less expensive housing and in some cases inland areas are becoming places where people are commuting from to coastal areas."

Southern California's Riverside County saw its population swell 9.9 percent to an estimated 1.7 million between April 2000 to July 2002, making it the second-fastest growing county in the state.

"The basic process is population growth in places where people can afford to buy houses. That is what is happening," Kotkin said.

Maribel Guzman said her hometown in Central California's Stanislaus County, which ranks as the state's third-fastest growing county, is no longer dotted with the peach and almond groves of her youth.

"It's grown a whole lot. It used to be ranches and orchards. Now it is houses coming up everywhere," she said.

Guzman, a real estate agent, said she has sold homes to young San Francisco Bay area couples who have decided to move east, lured by the opportunity to buy three-bedroom starter homes for about \$185,000.

Although they can no longer afford to live near San Francisco, many of Stanislaus' new residents continue to work there despite daily round-trip commutes of up to four hours.

"They can't afford a house over there, so they come here," Guzman said.

Experts say employers could soon follow in the footsteps of their employees.

"Companies will have to chase their work force to a certain extent," said Kotkin.

"It is increasingly very difficult to have an employ-

ment base in a place like San Francisco where only 20 percent of the population can even think of buying a house," Kotkin said. "You are going to find more and more people unwilling to work there."

Ten fastest-growing counties in CA

By The Associated Press

The 10 fastest-growing counties in California, as measured by percentage gain of population, between April 1, 2000, to July 1, 2002, and the 10 most populous counties in the nation as of July 2002, according to the Census Bureau.

COUNTY	2002POP	CHG
Placer	278,509	12.1
Riverside	1,699,112	9.9
San Joaquin	614,302	9.0
Stanislaus	482,440	7.9
Yolo	180,856	7.2
Merced	225,398	7.0
Sacramento	1,305,082	6.7
Lake	61,970	6.3
San Bernardino	1,816,072	6.2
El Dorado	165,744	6.0

COUNTY	STATE	2002POP
Los Angeles	Calif.	9,806,577
Cook	Ill.	5,377,507
Harris	Texas	3,557,055
Maricopa	Ariz.	3,303,876
Orange	Calif.	2,938,507
San Diego	Calif.	2,906,660
Kings	N.Y.	2,488,194
Miami-Dade	Fla.	2,332,599
Dallas	Texas	2,283,953
Queens	N.Y.	2,237,815

Dr. Atkins of controversial high-protein diet dies at 72

BY LUKAS I. ALPERT

Associated Press Writer

NEW YORK — Dr. Robert C. Atkins, whose best-selling low-carbohydrate, high-protein diet was dismissed as nutritional folly for years but was recently validated in some research, died Thursday, his spokesman said. He was 72.

Atkins died at New York Weill-Cornell Medical Center, surrounded by his wife and close friends, said Richard Rothstein, his spokesman.

Atkins had suffered a severe head injury April 8 after falling on an icy side-

walk while walking to work. He underwent surgery to remove a blood clot from his brain, Rothstein said.

Atkins first advocated his unorthodox weight-loss plan — which emphasizes meat, eggs and cheese and discourages bread, rice and fruit — in his 1972 book, "Dr. Atkins' Diet Revolution."

Its publication came at a time when the medical establishment was encouraging a low-fat, high-carbohydrate diet. The following year, the American Medical Association dismissed Atkins' diet as nutritional folly and Congress summoned him to Capitol Hill to defend the plan.

Labeling it "potentially dangerous," the AMA said the diet's scientific underpinning was "naïve" and "biochemically incorrect." It scolded the book's publishers for promoting "bizarre concepts of nutrition and dieting."

Despite this, his books sold 15 million copies, and millions of people tried the diet. Atkins' philosophy enjoyed a resurgence in the 1990s with "Dr. Atkins' New Diet Revolution," which sold more than 10 million copies worldwide and spent five years on The New York Times best-seller list. His most recent book, "Atkins for Life," has been on the Times' best-seller list since its release in January.

In an interview published this month in Business 2.0 magazine, Atkins said he was always able to deal with the criticism because of his unflagging belief in the diet.

"I want to eradicate obesity and diabetes," Atkins said. "I believe God wants me to do that."

"Why would I give up?" Atkins asked. "I'm on the verge of succeeding."

But criticism of the diet lingered, with many arguing that it could affect kidney function, raise cholesterol levels and deprive the dieter of important nutrients.

Atkins said no study showed that people with normal kidney function developed problems because of a high-protein diet, and he never gave in to his detractors.

Defending his plan at the American Dietetic Association's convention in 2000, Atkins quipped, "I'm very happy to be here. Not as happy as Daniel in the lion's den."

This year, his approach was vindicated in part by the very medical community that scorned him. In February, some half-dozen studies showed that people on the Atkins diet lost weight without compromising their health. The studies showed that Atkins dieters' cardiovascular risk factors and overall cholesterol profiles

changed for the better.

Still, many of the researchers were reluctant to recommend the Atkins diet, saying a large new study now under way could settle lingering questions of its long-term effects.

On the Atkins diet, up to two-thirds of calories may come from fat — more than double the usual recommendation, and violating what medical professionals have long believed about healthy eating. Carbohydrates are the foundation of a good diet, most say. Eating calorie-dense fat is what makes people fat, they say, and eating saturated fat is dangerous.

To Atkins, the key dietary villain in obesity was carbohydrates. He argued they make susceptible people pump out too much insulin, which in turn encourages them to put on fat.

Fat in foods can be a dieter's friend, Atkins said, in part because it quenches appetite and stops carbohydrate craving.

Atkins, a graduate of Cornell University's medical school, first tried a low-carbohydrate diet in 1963 after reading about one in the Journal of the American Medical Association. He said he lost weight so easily that he converted his fledgling Manhattan cardiology practice into an obesity clinic.

Besides his work on nutrition, Atkins also argued that ozone gas can kill cancer cells and HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, and claimed to have treated more than 1,000 patients with ozone therapy.

The ozone treatment is a common alternative therapy in Germany and some other nations but has not gained acceptance in the United States.

In 1999, Atkins established the Robert C. Atkins Foundation to finance diet research. It has sponsored research at Duke University, the University of Connecticut and Harvard.

CNN blames human error for releasing mock-ups of obits

BY ANICK JESDANUN

AP Internet Writer

NEW YORK — CNN blamed human error Thursday for exposing obituary mock-ups that its Web site's designers had prepared for Ronald Reagan, Bob Hope and other prominent figures.

The templates, which were to be used when the person died, had been on a development site meant for internal review. But the public briefly had access to them after the password protection was disabled.

CNN was investigating the cause of the error, which was discovered and fixed Wednesday. CNN spokeswoman Edna Johnson said technicians were trying to determine how long the mock-ups had been exposed through the development site, which was not directly accessible from the main CNN.com news site.

Although the templates were no longer accessible to the public, the search engine Google still had a reference Thursday to

Reagan's, titled "Ronald Reagan Remembered."

Another Web site, The Smoking Gun, also had copies of mock-ups for Reagan, Hope, Fidel Castro, Pope John Paul II, Nelson Mandela, Gerald Ford and Dick Cheney.

News organizations, including The Associated Press, routinely prepare obituaries on prominent figures so stories can be run quickly when they die.

In 1998, miscoding caused one such article, for Hope, to be inadvertently displayed on the AP's Web site, prompting a congressman to erroneously announce his death on the floor of the House of Representatives. The story did not say Hope had died, but the headline did.

The CNN mock-ups do not actually say that the subject had died, although they had a placeholder for the year of death, as in "1941-2001" for Cheney. The write-ups also referred to subjects in the past tense.



INTERNATIONAL

Soldiers become reluctant policeman in Baghdad

BY CHRIS TOMLINSON
Associated Press Writer

BAGHDAD, Iraq — The radio call was urgent: bank robbery in progress, gunmen still in the building, immediate backup needed.

Only this is Baghdad, and backup came in five armored vehicles filled with soldiers who have become reluctant policemen in a city wracked with tensions.

Residents are furious that fellow Iraqis loot and rob, angry that U.S. troops rarely assume the role of police and resentful when they do — and all that raged at full boil.

In the end, a potentially disastrous encounter was peacefully defused: No lives lost, one more burst of lawlessness reined in, another lesson in negotiating the troubled city of 5 million.

Still, police duties are something U.S. troops are reluctant to take on. Forces here are trained and armed to kill, and experienced soldiers are wary that good-intentioned efforts to stop civilian looting could lead to violence.

On Thursday, when the soldiers roared up, crowds and chaos clogged the narrow streets around a branch of the al-Rashid Bank.

A dozen special operations troops and scouts struggled to hold back hundreds of

angry civilians. The thieves — men and teenagers — hid inside and by the rear door as troops arrived in desert camouflage and flak jackets, assault rifles in hand.

The civilians surged forward; the soldiers pushed back. At one point, soldiers cocked their weapons and charged the civilians, screaming at them when they refused to move.

"This has the potential to be a bad situation," was the dry assessment from Army Sgt. Chris Darden, an infantry team leader with A Company, 3rd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment.

The standoff ended with only shots fired in the air, and with 12 suspected robbers detained, several of them teenagers. As the Americans brought out the suspects, most of the crowd cheered, chanting, "Good, good, mister!" while the parents of the teenagers wept and begged the soldiers to release them.

Still, the two ringleaders escaped, armed with assault rifles and explosives. Millions of dollars in U.S. and Iraqi currency were taken to a military base for safekeeping.

Witnesses gave this account: A group of thieves entered the bank offices and began trying to break into the two main vaults. They blew a hole in the roof of one vault, but too small for an adult — so they

began lowering children inside to pass out money in fistfuls.

Word soon hit Baghdad's streets, however, and people poured in, demanding the thieves hand over the money. The crowd, many of whom had accounts at the bank, caught the attention of a special operations patrol.

A Company was called in with their armored vehicles to provide security while the special forces troops blew a larger hole to get the money out. They picked up bricks of consecutively numbered \$100 bills, still in their Federal Reserve bundles and each worth \$100,000, and filled five burlap sandbags — some \$4 million.

The crowds continued to grow and more soldiers were called in. More than 100 infantrymen, accustomed to being shot at and quickly returning fire, were expected to show the utmost restraint.

"These people want the money and they believe it is rightfully their money, but they don't understand that the proper distribution is not first-come, first-served," said Army Col. Philip DeCamp, a battalion commander.

Some civilians cheered the soldiers, but others, who blamed the U.S. troops for the looting that has ravaged the city, taunted them.

"So are we still shooting people?" asked

Spc. Michael Tonjes of San Ramone, Calif., before answering the question himself. "No? So we're peacekeeping."

Tonjes and some of the older soldiers served with A Company during a rotation through Kosovo, and know about peacekeeping. And they know that's how they will likely spend their last weeks in Iraq.

"This is the most dangerous part," Staff Sgt. Thomas Slago of Los Angeles said. "This is when they start sniping at you. Before, you knew who the enemy was, now it could be anybody."

Senior soldiers in the company have listened in horror to reports of U.S. troops shooting at civilians elsewhere. They fear their edgy troops could end up in a similar situation because they aren't trained or equipped to be policemen, they are trained and armed to kill.

"Trying to ramp these men down is impossible," said 1st Sgt. Cedric Burns of Sylvania, Ga. "After they've seen all of this combat, they are not ready for peacekeeping. They need to get some troops in here who are trained for this kind of operation and let us go home."

Company has employed former government officials

WAR, from page 1

procedure as the only way to get help to Iraq quickly.

The San Francisco-based company has employed several officials after they left high government jobs, including former Secretary of State George Shultz and former Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger.

The Bechtel Group and its employees have been among the biggest political givers in the general contracting industry, according to an analysis by the Center for Responsive Politics, a nonpartisan Washington-based group that tracks campaign finance.

The company and its workers contributed at least \$277,050 to federal candidates and party committees in the last election cycle, about 57 percent to Democrats and 43 percent to Republicans, the center found.

In addition to Bechtel's work utility systems, the contract also provides for rehabilitation or repair of airport facilities and

dredging, repair and upgrading of the Umm Qasr seaport in cooperation with other contractors, the assistance agency said.

Bechtel also may have a role in repair and reconstruction of hospitals, schools, selected government ministry buildings, irrigation facilities and transportation links.

The agency said Bechtel probably would hire subcontractors for many of the projects.

"Through all of its activities, it will also engage the Iraqi population and work to build local capacity," the announcement said.

"Bechtel is honored to have been asked by USAID to help bring humanitarian assistance, economic recovery and infrastructure reconstruction to the Iraqi people," said Tom Hash, president of Bechtel National, Inc.

The question of who rebuilds Iraq has divided the president's advisers and even the two major coalition partners in the current war, the United States and Britain. British Prime Minister Tony Blair has sought deeper U.N. involvement in post-war Iraq than President Bush.



David Guttenfelder/Associated Press

U.S. Special Forces make arrests of suspected bank robbers inside the gutted interior of a bank in Baghdad's banking district on Thursday. Baghdad's banking district remains one of the last centers of attraction for looters attempting to cart off millions remaining in the vaults of the capital's institutions.



Dusan Vranic/Associated Press

Plumes of thick smoke mark Baghdad's skyline on Thursday. U.S. forces have begun to crack down on lawlessness in the Iraqi capital amid criticism that they have not done enough to protect the city.

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SPORTS



No more boredom, Lakers ready to win 4th title

BY JOHN NADEL
AP Sports Writer

EL SEGUNDO — For the Los Angeles Lakers, the boredom is over. After a season of ups and downs, they believe they're ready to win a fourth straight title.

"We know how to win in hostile environments, we know how to win in clutch situations," Kobe Bryant said before a team meeting and film session Thursday. "The playoffs bring up a different atmosphere."

The Lakers have appeared bored at times this season — three straight championships can do that to a team. Robert Horry admitted as much, estimating the adrenaline factor was at 50 or 60 much of the time.

"With the playoffs, it's going to push our adrenaline level to 100," he said.

The Lakers begin their quest at becoming the second NBA team to win at least four straight championships where it all began for them — in Minneapolis against the Minnesota Timberwolves on Sunday.

The Lakers won five championships in 12 years in Minneapolis before moving to Los Angeles in 1960. They've won nine since.

The Boston Celtics are the only NBA team to win more than three straight championships, winning eight in a row from 1959-66.

The Timberwolves (51-31) are seeded fourth in the Western Conference with the Lakers (50-32) fifth. The best-of-seven series continues Tuesday night before moving to Los Angeles for Games 3 and 4.

"They've always wanted home-court advantage," Lakers coach Phil Jackson said. "This is the year they've got it. Hopefully we can spoil their dream."

"You play at a certain level during the season — it's time to step it up. If you lose now, you're gone, you're going fishing."

The Timberwolves have never won a

playoff series, being eliminated in the first round in each of the last six years.

As Jackson pointed out, though, they've never had home-court advantage. And they're very good at home, going 33-8 at the Target Center this season.

"They've played well all year," Rick Fox said. "They've earned that No. 4 spot. We have to play in a hostile environment. They bring the noise, that's for sure."

Even though four teams had better regular-season records, Fox believes the Lakers are the team to beat.

"This is a time we always respond. It's an exciting time," he said. "Who we face, who we play, really doesn't matter if we take care of our business."

Lakers star Shaquille O'Neal arrived late to the team's practice facility, missing a media availability and the start of the meeting, spokesman John Black said.

O'Neal, who missed practice April 9, claiming his sports utility vehicle got two flat tires on the San Diego Freeway, telephoned to say he was delayed in traffic, Black said.

The Lakers are on the road mainly because of an 11-19 start. O'Neal missed the first 12 games recovering from off-season surgery on his big right toe, and wasn't in top shape for several months.

He is now.

That had a lot to do with the Lakers' 39-13 record to finish the season, and is one of the main reasons Jackson and Bryant believe they're better now than they were a year ago at this time.

And the Lakers went 15-4 during last year's playoffs.

"Mentally, physically we feel great," said Bryant, who became the third Laker ever to average 30 or more points this season, joining Elgin Baylor and Jerry West.

Bryant and Minnesota's Kevin Garnett are among the top candidates for the

NBA's Most Valuable Player award, along with San Antonio's Tim Duncan and Orlando's Tracy McGrady.

"He's the catalyst of their team," Horry said of Garnett. "He's going to want to get out of the first round bad. He's going to do his thing."

"They've got a really good team. When I say team, I don't just mean Kevin."

The Lakers and Timberwolves split four games this season. The Lakers won the last two — 106-96 at Staples Center on March 7, when O'Neal had 40 points and 14 rebounds, and 106-99 at the Target Center a week later.

The Lakers face the probable task of not having home-court advantage throughout the playoffs with the exception of the NBA Finals, should they get that far.

Only one team in the East, the Detroit Pistons, won as many as 50.

But the Lakers have shown they can win on the road in the playoffs, going 8-0 two years ago and 7-2 last year.

They were just 19-22 this season.

Bryant said he loves playing on the road.

"There's something about silencing the crowd," he said with a smile. "It feels good."

Lovin' it



Mary Ann Chastain/Associated Press

Davis Love III hits out of the trap on the ninth green during the first round of the MCI Heritage on Thursday, at Harbour Town Golf Links on Hilton Head Island, S.C.

L.A. Clippers end yet another season in disarray

BY BETH HARRIS
AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES — The Clippers gathered at midcourt for a group hug after winning their third game in a row to end another losing season.

It might have been the last time some of them are on the same team.

Owner Donald Sterling has big decisions to make this summer about the future of several players and interim coach Dennis Johnson, who took over after Alvin Gentry was fired March 3.

Sterling visited the locker room after Wednesday night's season-ending victory over Portland, and exchanged hugs and back slaps with several players.

But several of them said they've been given no indication of their status for next season.

Eric Piatkowski, Sean Rooks and Michael Olowokandi are eligible to become unrestricted free agents July 1. Elton Brand, Andre Miller, Corey Maggette and Lamar Odom will be restricted free agents, with the Clippers holding the right to match any offer.

"Your top players are not happy with what's transpired over the past season. We're obviously going to lose the big fella (Olowokandi), and what happens after that, I couldn't even tell you," Rooks said.

"A lot of people were worried about contracts, and that's a legitimate thing to people. But we still should definitely have had a better season than we had."

Injuries played a part in the Clippers' record of 27-55 that landed them at the bottom of the Pacific Division and 13th among 14 Western Conference teams.

A total of 289 games were missed because of illness or injury. Olowokandi had knee surgery in February and didn't return. Odom missed 45 games with a sprained right wrist. Brand had right knee surgery in September, then missed 18 games with a stress fracture in his leg.

"I felt we would make the playoffs this year, but we had to be more professional," Maggette said.

Johnson finished with an 8-16 mark after being elevated from assistant to interim coach.

"From the time I've taken over, I think this team has played very hard and I think they've flourished under me," Johnson said. "We're very capable of doing good things here."

Several players said they hope he stays, and Johnson said he wants to return.

"Hopefully a lot of guys will be back. Coach DJ, hopefully they take care of him because I think he earned a shot," Brand said. "We put together some good games that people should take notice from."

The Clippers' talent was never in question, and expectations were high that they would make the playoffs for the first time since 1997.

But the number of players with no contract commitment beyond this season affected team chemistry.

"The talent we had were young guys who hadn't really had a payday yet and

they were very concerned about that payday," Piatkowski said. "So that caused a tremendous amount of problems with regard to selfishness. When things got out of hand, instead of playing as a team to get back in games, guys just kind of started looking out for themselves."

The Clippers were forced to adjust to point guard Miller, who was acquired from Cleveland in a trade for Darius Miles. Miller led the NBA in assists last season, but ranked ninth this year.

The quiet Miller was the exact opposite of the flashy Miles, and at times Miller felt his role was never defined.

"Andre has taken a lot of heat here and there," Rooks said. "But you have to have people to pass the ball to and in the right places to pass the ball. There were a lot of times this year that we didn't execute plays, and maybe that was a lot of the reason why he couldn't get assists."

Odom compared the Clippers to an abstract painting.

"I don't even know where to start," he said. "The distractions away from the court were a little too strong for us to overcome. It's going to take more than just having good players on the team. We don't have a pattern of anything."

Coveted quarterback to leave high school early for USC

By The Associated Press

SHREVEPORT, La. — Heavily recruited quarterback John David Booty will finish high school early and enroll in the University of Southern California next fall. Booty, a 6-foot-4, 190-pound two-time all-state player from Evangel Christian Academy, made the decision five days after the school fired his father, John Booty, as quarterbacks coach.

School officials refused to say why John Booty was fired. He had recently begun a Bible-study group and ministerial Web site, actions he said put him at odds with the school chancellor.

His son needs only one English credit to complete his graduation requirements, and he intends to take that class over the summer. He then plans to skip his senior year, go to Los Angeles in July and start classes at USC in August; the Trojans open their season Aug. 30 at Auburn.

"I'm not putting any pressure on myself to be some superstar or be an All-American next year," Booty told the Los Angeles Times.

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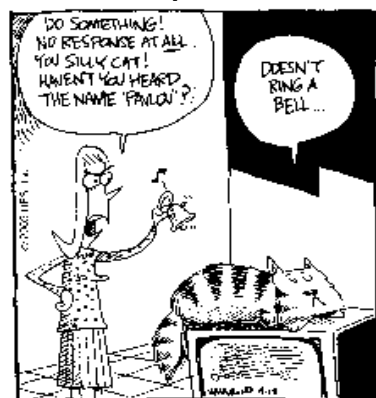


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ACROSS

- 1 Showy flower
- 6 Backyard game
- 11 Pursue
- 12 Tara family name
- 13 Libertines
- 14 Kobe Bryant, for one
- 15 Exalted verse
- 16 Cunning
- 18 Corn unit
- 19 Sinking call
- 20 Vegas opening
- 21 Enjoy Alta
- 22 Influenced
- 24 Year parts
- 25 Gaming spots
- 27 Work the land
- 29 Redcoats, as a check
- 32 Important time
- 33 Took a load off
- 34 Author Levin
- 35 Rapper's aid, for short
- 36 Yale player
- 37 Pester
- 38 Crooked
- 40 More than pudgy
- 42 Depart

DOWN

- 43 Staff symbols
- 44 Stage direction
- 45 Derisive sound
- 1 Unlike this answer
- 2 Tail
- 3 Tries
- 4 Language suffix
- 5 Used car transactions
- 6 Indiana team
- 7 Cry of understanding
- 8 Likes floors
- 9 Like old floors
- 10 Singer Emmylou
- 17 Extreme giving veggie
- 23 Thanks-doubled
- 26 Lands

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Yesterday's answer

- 8 Likes
- 9 Like old floors
- 10 Singer Emmylou
- 17 Extreme giving veggie
- 23 Thanks-doubled
- 26 Lands
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- 28 Out of bed
- 30 It gets the lead out
- 31 Most wise
- 33 Norton's workplace
- 39 Apple sampler
- 41 Good, to Georges

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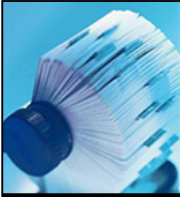
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Phone Booth (R) 11:45, 12:50, 1:55, 3:00, 4:05, 5:10, 6:15, 7:20, 8:25, 9:30, 10:35. A Mighty Wind (PG-13) 12:00, 1:05, 2:30, 3:35, 5:00, 6:05, 7:30, 8:35, 10:00.
MANN CRITERION
1313 Third St.
Bringing down the House (PG-13) 11:30, 2:05, 4:50, 7:30, 10:20. Basic (R) 11:35, 2:15, 4:45, 7:15, 10:05. Chasing Papi 11:45, 2:10, 4:30, 7:00, 9:30. Old School (R) 12:15, 2:40, 5:10, 7:45, 10:15. A Man Apart (R) 11:15, 2:00, 5:05, 8:00, 10:35. House of 1,000 Corpses (R) 12:00, 2:30, 5:00, 7:35, 10:00.
AMC THEATRE SM 7
1310 3rd Street
Anger Management (PG-13) 12:00, 1:00, 2:35, 4:15, 5:10, 6:45, 7:45, 9:30, 10:15. Bulletproof Monk (PG-13) 12:10, 2:40, 5:20, 7:55, 10:30. Chicago (PG-13) 1:15, 4:00, 7:00, 9:45. What a Girl Wants (PG) 2:05, 4:40, 7:10, 9:35. Head of State (PG-13) 1:45, 4:30, 7:30, 10:00. The Pianist (R) 12:40, 4:05, 7:20, 10:25.
LANDMARK NU-WILSHIRE
1314 Wilshire Blvd.
XX/XY (R) 5:00, 7:30, 9:45. Laurel Canyon (R) 4:30, 7:00, 9:30.
LAEMMLE MONICA
1332 2nd St.
Levity (NR) 12:00, 2:30, 5:00, 7:30, 10:00. Bend it Like Beckham (PG-13) 12:00, 2:35, 5:10, 7:45, 10:20. Assassination Tango (R) 1:30, 4:15, 7:00, 9:45.

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BACK PAGE

Son of oilman J. Paul Getty dies in Britain at 70

BY JANE WARDELL
Associated Press Writer

LONDON — Sir J. Paul Getty Jr., the reclusive third son of billionaire American oilman J. Paul Getty, died Thursday in Britain, the country he adopted as his homeland and lavished with his philanthropic gifts. He was 70.

Getty, a reformed drug addict who donated more than \$200 million to a variety of causes, died in London Clinic, where he was hospitalized Monday with a recurrent chest infection, Dr. John Goldstone said.

"He may have been born in the United States, but he was truly a British citizen," said Theresa May, chairwoman of the opposition Conservative Party, which received \$8 million from Getty.

Getty himself did not hesitate to praise Britain in the rare public statements he made about his life, explaining his philanthropy as his debt to his adopted country.

"I think that since I've lived here and been happy here for such a long time, I think it's my duty here," he once said. "I certainly don't intend to live in America again. I intend to be buried here."

Getty was given the honorary title of Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire in 1986 for services to charity, but could not be called Sir Paul then because he was not a British citizen.

He was invested with the full honors in 1998, a year after changing his citizenship,

and became known in Britain as Sir Paul.

"When I heard the national anthem played, I felt very proud to be British — it's my national anthem now," Getty said after his investiture at Buckingham Palace. "I love Britain's way of life. I love its people. I love its history, and I love its future."

Getty's larger donations include \$63 million to the National Gallery in London and \$32 million to the British Film Institute.

"He was the most important single benefactor the BFI has had in its history," Adrian Wootton, the institute's acting director, said Thursday. "Without him, much of our work wouldn't be possible. ... He was a very passionate man about art, film and, of course, cricket, which he loved more than anything."

Ironically, Sir Paul also helped prevent precious art such as Antonio Canova's statue, "The Three Graces," from being bought by his father's pride and joy, the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles.

Getty's passion for cricket — the English bat and ball game — spurred him to give thousands of dollars to cricket clubs and install a private cricket ground at his Buckinghamshire estate.

In other philanthropic deeds, he once paid to rescue a family of seals caught in a storm, bought a mansion for needy children and gave a grand piano to a concert pianist who did not own one.

After subsidizing the families of striking miners in 1985, he said he was "privileged to be the heir to huge wealth, and I regard myself as custodian of that money

for the benefit of people who need it more than I do."

Born on Sept. 7, 1932, John Paul Getty Jr. was the third of five sons of J. Paul Getty, nicknamed "Oklahoma Crude," who built Getty Oil into a \$6 billion fortune — making him the world's richest man in his day.

After attending the University of San Francisco and doing a brief stint in the U.S. Army, Getty Jr. took charge of Getty Oil enterprises in Rome. But he resigned within six years, telling his father, "It doesn't take anything to be a businessman."

He then embarked on a freewheeling lifestyle of drugs and parties, letting his hair grow out and adopting colorful velvet kaftans. In 1966, he divorced his wife of 10 years, Gail, with whom he had four children.

But the hippie life ended in 1971 when Bali-born model Talitha Pol, Getty's second wife and mother of his fifth child, died of an accidental drug overdose in Rome.

He moved to Britain in 1972 and, taking solace in heroin and rum, for years lived alone in a heavily secured mansion on the River Thames in London's upscale Chelsea neighborhood. He gave no interviews, issuing only the occasional statement through his lawyers.

The bulk of Getty's fortune came from a family trust after the sale of Getty Oil to Texaco in 1984; his father, from whom he was estranged, left him only a nominal sum in his will.

The younger Getty's fortune was esti-

mated to be as high as \$2 billion, but he said much of it was in family trusts that he did not control.

In 1973, Getty's teenage son from his first marriage, John Paul III, was abducted in Italy and held for five months. It was only after the kidnappers cut off part of his ear and sent it to the family that the boy's grandfather agreed to help pay a reported ransom of \$3.4 million.

In the early 1980s, the youngster had a drug-induced stroke that left him a paraplegic and practically blind.

In 1994, the staunchly Catholic Getty married Victoria Holdsworth, his longtime British girlfriend, who is credited with his rehabilitation and gradual emergence into public life.

Getty and his wife retained a London apartment, but spent most of their time at their country estate at Wormsley in Buckinghamshire, with its cricket ground and mock medieval castle housing Getty's books.

"I owe everything — repeat everything — to Victoria," he told an interviewer shortly after his marriage. "She has been my inspiration, you could say."

Getty is survived by Victoria and his five children — John Paul III, Ariadne, Aileen, Tara and Mark.

No funeral plans were immediately announced.

"His family would like to extend their thanks to all those who have expressed their sympathy, which is greatly appreciated," Goldstone said in a statement.

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