

FREE

THURSDAY, MAY 9, 2002

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Santa Monica Daily Press

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Car jumps curb



Jesse Haley/Special to the Daily Press

A woman lost control of her Honda Accord Wednesday at the corner of Washington Avenue and 10th Street. A tall shrub stopped her from driving into an apartment building. Police and fire responded to the scene. The unidentified driver did not appear injured.

Series of arson fires plague neighborhood

BY ANDREW H. FIXMER

Daily Press Staff Writer

A mid city neighborhood near the Santa Monica border has experienced a series of intentionally set fires in the past year.

The latest incident occurred Saturday when a small, unoccupied guest house on the 1700 block of Franklin Street went up in flames. Santa Monica Fire Department investigators ruled the fire's cause as arson.

There have been 10 arson fires at five different locations over the past year, eight within the past four months. The neighborhood is located east from 26th Street to Centinela Avenue, between Santa Monica and Olympic Boulevards.

No one has been injured or killed from the fires.

"We know there is a fire problem in that part of the city," said assistant fire marshal Jim Glew. "We are in a high level of awareness and our resources are being

deployed with increased police patrols and whenever there is a fire in that area both fire and police are dispatched in hopes of apprehending this individual and putting this to a conclusion."

"We know there is a fire problem in that part of the city."

— JIM GLEW

Santa Monica Fire Department

Last year, a laundry room at an apartment complex at 1744 Franklin Street was set on fire causing \$8,000 in damage. A second fire was set in the same location two months later causing another \$4,000 in damages, officials say.

See ARSON, page 4

Russian-themed charter school planned for area

BY ANDREW H. FIXMER

Daily Press Staff Writer

A Russian-themed charter school may open its doors in Santa Monica by next year.

The Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District will host a public hearing on the proposed Hollywood Charter School on May 16. The meeting will be held at 7 p.m. in the Santa Monica City Council Chambers in City Hall.

Alla Matusova and a group of supporters have filed petitions to open charter schools in several communities

throughout the Los Angeles region. The group plans to open its Santa Monica school on Kansas Avenue.

Matusova said the group wants to open charter schools where there are large concentrations of Russian families. They chose to open one in Santa Monica because they hope to serve the large Russian community here.

"Many families are driving on the weekends to Los Angeles for their children to take Russian courses," Matusova said. "But it's not comfortable for these families because they would rather spend their time at home on the weekends."

The school would teach traditional classes in math, science and the humanities in English, but children would be required to take at least two classes in Russian a week, Matusova said.

If the school opens next fall as planned, organizers hope to have classes ready for children from kindergarten to eighth grade. High school grades would be added as children graduate from the lower levels.

"High school is very important; it's the last step toward independent life," Matusova said. "The first year we will work with kids in eighth grade and then prepare them for our program. We will train them well. We want our kids to enter high school with great grades and solid achievements."

Matusova said she helps run similar Russian-themed schools in Hollywood. The group currently has a day-care center and a private pre-school that teaches Russian to children.

Matusova and her husband operate a Russian newspaper called Los Angeles Vestnik.

Charter schools are private schools that receive state funding but create their own curriculum. The Hollywood Charter school would be the first Russian charter school in the city.

The Santa Monica-Malibu school board will decide whether to allow the school in Santa Monica.

"We are still doing our due diligence on evaluating their proposal," said school superintendent John Deasy. "It's a situation where at the public hearing people proposing the school will bring forward their charter and gives us a chance to ask them questions about it."

The official decision will be made public at the June 6 school board meeting at the HRL Laboratories Building, located at 3011 Malibu Canyon Road in Malibu.

A handshake isn't what it used to be

Judge says verbal agreements don't mean much

BY ANDREW H. FIXMER

Daily Press Staff Writer

When it comes to business a handshake isn't good enough, a judge ruled this week.

Two separate lawsuits appeared before Santa Monica Small Claims Court Judge Pro Tem Frank R. Smith in which four businessmen couldn't agree on what they owed

each other.

First, Judge Smith tossed out a suit Kenneth B. Oefelein levied against architect Douglas Campbell for work he claims he wasn't paid for after he completed technical drawings on Campbell's project.

Then Smith only granted a partial claim to Thomas Todoroff's \$5,000 suit against Neil Lane, a plumber who did remodeling work at a condo on Fourth Street.

Both lawsuits could have been avoided if contracts had been drawn up and both parties had agreed to the terms before any work had begun, Judge Smith said.

"Drawing up a contract certainly protects both parties," he said. "You're a damn fool if you don't have one, but then a lot of people don't do it."

"In the old days a handshake was good enough, but these days it doesn't mean the same thing," he added.

Oefelein sued Campbell for \$1,600 in back wages after Campbell refused to pay him.

Campbell said he told Oefelein he would pay him \$15 an hour and if the work was satisfactory, the pay would go up an additional \$20 an hour after three weeks.

See HANDSHAKE, page 4

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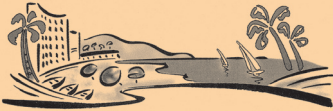
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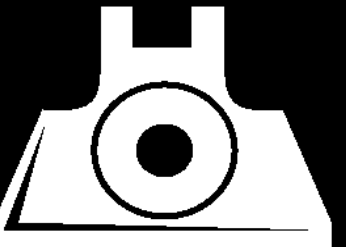


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Check Out the Question of the Week
on Page 4 and Call Us with Your Opinion!

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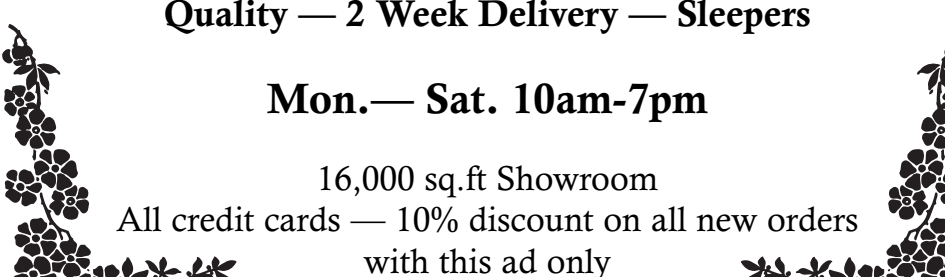
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ARIES (March 21-April 19)

★★★★ Your smile wins the day, though you could find yourself deep in others' problems if you're not careful! Focus on priorities as you reach out for another. High energy marks your actions and activities. Listen well to another. Consider that you might be over-indulging someone. Tonight: Keep on smiling.



TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

★★★ Take your time making decisions with others. After the tumultuousness of recent days, you still might need to walk on eggshells, especially concerning your finances. A devil-may-care attitude could take over out of the blue. Is that what you really want? Maintain a sense of humor. Tonight: Do some soul-searching.



GEMINI (May 21-June 20)

★★★★ Your perspective could change dramatically. Listen carefully to another's feedback. Instead of putting up the customary barriers, flow with openness. You will find that someone has much in mind. Think in terms of success and change. Say "yes" to a key meeting. Tonight: Play away.



CANCER (June 21-July 22)

★★★★ Carefully listen to another's sharing. You could be overwhelmed by what you're hearing. Stay on top of what is going on. You need to reverse your direction or do some reorganization on the job. Follow-through makes an enormous difference in what goes on. Think positively. Tonight: Work late.



LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)

★★★★★ Reach out for those at a distance. You might enjoy gaining another perspective. Value the moment; flow with opportunity. Friends want you and drive a hard bargain. Creative thinking mixed with opportunity gives you reason to smile from ear to ear. A child could test your limits. Tonight: Take in a movie.



VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

★★★ Finally, others calm down and you can get more done, more efficiently. Consider what you need to do professionally, first. Don't hem and haw. Others appreciate your push. Don't overindulge a contrary family member. In fact, balance the different aspects of your life. Tonight: Spend time with a loved one.



LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)

★★★★★ Defer to those around you. Though you might have done that yesterday, today you reap your just rewards. Another lets you know how very much he or she appreciates you. You can finally move a key, heartfelt project. Still, let others think that they dominate. Tonight: Say "yes."



SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)

★★★★ Dig into work, eyeing the upcoming weekend. Schedule an early day tomorrow, if possible. Someone finally lets down his or her defenses. You might need to indulge this person financially and emotionally. Proceed with care regarding finances. Tonight: Work as late as need be.



SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

★★★★★ Use that endless creativity to resolve recent problems, be it at work, with those in your life or with an extremely personal relationship. You can do it! Pressure builds. Follow another's suggestion. Extremes punctuate the moment. You might want to approach a situation differently. Tonight: Play away.



CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

★★★★ Steer clear of another who might be provocative, in your book. Develop a stronger sense of direction through close personal discussions. Extremes mark a more nurturing situation. Use your instincts, but also observe. Tonight: Happy at home.



AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

★★★★★ You tell it like it is. Others listen as a result. Though you clearly might not have all the answers, you do have many. A child or new infatuation stars in your thoughts, if not your plans. A conversation draws a different point of view. Flex with another's desires. Tonight: At a favorite spot with a favorite person.



PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)

★★★★★ Use your instincts with a boss who pushes you way beyond your limit. Don't explode but, rather, stay mellow. Consider an opportunity that surrounds finances. What sounds good might very well be, but do your homework. Tonight: Your treat.



QUOTE of the DAY

“Anything that is too stupid
to be spoken is sung.”
— Voltaire (1694-1778)

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LOCAL



Registered sex offender caught

By Daily Press staff

A registered sex offender has been arrested after he was found lurking behind a Santa Monica home watching a child, according to Santa Monica police.

The Department of Justice's sexual predator apprehension team arrested the man April 20 after a Santa Monica woman witnessed the suspect looking through a fence behind her home on 22nd Street and California Avenue.

She reported the suspicious activity to Santa Monica police. Officers interviewed her child, and the woman was able to provide police with the suspect's license plate number.

The plate's number was tracked to a man registered as a convicted sex offender. The sexual predator apprehension team put the man under surveillance, during which time he was seen talking to two juvenile boys in Santa Monica.

Police declined to identify the man.

Pros and Cons of VERITAS ballot initiative to be debated

By Daily Press staff

A ballot initiative that would drastically rewrite how government and elections function in Santa Monica will be debated tonight.

The Wilshire/Montana Neighborhood Coalition will host a debate between Paul DeSantis, a local real estate lawyer, and Mayor Mike Feinstein at 7 p.m. at the Ken Edwards Center, 1527 Fourth Street.

DeSantis is an author and co-sponsor of the Voters Election Reform Initiative for a True Accountability System — also known as VERITAS. Feinstein believes the initiative would lead to bad government and pit neighborhoods against each other.

If approved, the ballot initiative would segregate the city into voting districts from which residents would elect representatives. There

would be seven term-limited council members and one city-wide elected mayor, who would be given veto powers.

Currently, the mayor is elected by the seven city council members. City council candidates run at-large throughout the eight square miles of Santa Monica's city limits and there are no term limits.

"WILMONT has not taken an official position, but the board (of directors) is concerned," said Pam Vavra, chair of the neighborhood council, in a written statement. "The item addresses numerous issues, each loaded with pros and cons."

She added, "There needs to be much discussion and debate on a measure that would so drastically change the business of government and politics in Santa Monica."

Retired local physician departs on goodwill tour of 49 states

By Daily Press staff

A local pilot took flight this week on a three-month trip around the country to tout two local organizations that help people in need.

Dr. Bernie Harris, a retired anesthesiologist and Santa Monica resident, will travel to 49 states to distribute information about two groups that he is ambassador of — the Emergency Volunteer Air Corps. and Angel Flight.

The Emergency Volunteer Air Corps. is a group of pilots and volunteers who are ready in the event of a disaster to transport key city personnel to Santa Monica from outlying areas.

Angel Flight provides flight transportation for people who need to travel for medical care but cannot afford airfare. Harris flew 40 missions for Angel Flight last year.

Harris is traveling mostly alone and estimates the trip will take between 2 1/2 to 3 months. He has been planning the trip for four years and will



photo courtesy of the Santa Monica Fire Department
Dr. Bernie Harris departed on a tour promoting two all-volunteer pilot organizations

fly the southern states first and then head up the eastern seaboard. From there, he will fly across to Idaho and into Alaska. He will return down the West coast to Santa Monica.

Harris has been flying for 32 years and has logged 3,600 hours of flight time.

They've got game



Seth Kotok/Special to the Daily Press

A pick-up game of basketball at Reed Park rounded out the afternoon for a group of Santa Monicans Wednesday.

Surf Report

Winds drop and the southwest swell fades fast today so prepare to go flat. Better exposed spots see inconsistent knee to waist high sets under clean conditions. Shadowed, northwest exposed spots stay under three feet.

Another strong south-southwest swell heads for Southern California tomorrow, though it won't reach the coastline until the weekend. Not much on tap Friday, but reports predict shoulder height and overhead surf when the new storm hits beaches next week.

(Information compiled by Jesse Haley.)

Location	Thursday	Friday	Water Quality
County Line	2-3'/Fair	2-3'/Fair	A
Zuma	2-3'/Good	2-3'/Good	A
Surfrider	1-2'/Good	1-2'/Fair	B
Topanga	1-2'/Fair	1-2'/Fair	B
Breakwater	1-3'/Fair	1-3'/Fair	A
El Porto	1-3'/Fair	1-3'/Fair	A

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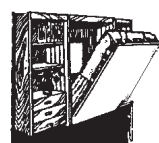
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LOCAL □ STATE



Police and fire officials investigating rash of fires

ARSON, from page 1

Margaret Engler Paez, the owner of the apartment complex, said the fires terrified her. She subsequently moved.

"I couldn't sleep anymore. I had tenants move out," she said. "We moved because we couldn't sleep anymore; every sound would wake us up. It definitely has changed our life."

Paez and her husband moved to Chino Hills, but they still work at Engler Brothers Motor Parts on Pico Boulevard and their daughter continues to live in the apartment building. Paez's building is two doors down from where Saturday's fire occurred.

"I thought it was all over until this happened," Paez said. "I am worried now because (my daughter) didn't even hear the fire on Saturday."

Months after the apartment fires, three dumpsters were set ablaze with in an hour of each other. Two months later, three cars were set on fire by an arsonist. Two were abandoned vehicles, and one was registered with the state, officials say.

An arsonist last month slipped an incendiary device through the mail slot of a neighborhood business, but because of the on-going investigation and privacy issues, officials would not release the specific address and names of victims.

Fire fighters and officers from the Santa Monica Police Department have formed an arson taskforce, which is help-

ing investigate the recent rash of fires in the area.

But so far a suspect has not been identified, and officials said they do not know if the fires are an act of a single person or a group of people.

**"I am worried now
because (my daughter)
didn't even hear the
fire on Saturday."**

— MARGARET ENGLER PAEZ
Apartment complex owner

"The thing that connects them as a pattern is that they are incendiary and in the same geographical area," Glew said.

He added that arson, which can carry a felony charge in California, is one of the hardest crimes to prove.

"You basically have to have somebody at the scene witness the individual set the fire, direct circumstantial evidence, or a clear motive that explains intent," he said. "Without the community's help, finding and arsonist is very hard."

Fire officials encourage neighborhoods to form organized watches and to report any suspicious behavior immediately to the Santa Monica Police Department's communications center at (310) 458-8491.

When conducting business, draw up a written contract

HANDSHAKE, from page 1

But Campbell didn't pay the bonus and cut Oefelein's hours in half, saying he wasn't satisfied with Oefelein's work.

Campbell counter-sued Oefelein for \$2,837 because he claimed Oefelein removed the drawings from his computer files after he refused to pay him. As a result, Campbell had to have the work re-done.

Smith denied both claims because neither party could prove the conditions of their verbal agreement.

"Always get agreements in writing," he said. "When you have these verbal contracts, it always comes down to a case of 'he said I said.' It makes a judge's work very difficult."

Todoroff, a developer, sued Lane for \$5,000 for faulty plumbing work he did at a Fourth Street property. Lane abandoned the job about three-quarters of the way through, which forced Todoroff to pay another plumber to finish the job.

Lane argued his work was not faulty and had been approved by Santa Monica

building inspectors, but he provided no evidence to back up that claim.

Smith awarded Todoroff \$3,193.64 for the work another plumber did to repair Lane's work.

"In the old days a handshake was good enough, but these days it doesn't mean the same thing."

— FRANK R. SMITH
Judge Pro Tem

In cases where both parties are working under a verbal contract, Smith said he looks at the billing to find the truth.

"No one does work out of the goodness of their heart," he said. "The billing will tell you what the other fellow did and how much he was supposed to be compensated for it."

The Q Line

Plenty of coastal cities throughout southern California allow dogs on their beaches, with strict regulations.

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STATE



Novelist Danielle Steel holds 26 parking permits

BY MARGIE MASON
Associated Press Writer

SAN FRANCISCO — Romance novelist Danielle Steel has more than just dozens of best-selling book titles to her name. She also has the largest number of parking permits issued in jam-packed San Francisco — a story that soon could come to an end.

A proposal to limit residential parking permits to three per household is expected to go before a Board of Supervisors committee Thursday. Currently, residents can buy an unlimited number of permits for \$27 a year in a city where the number of vehicles outnumbered on-street spaces by nearly 200,000.

The issue, referred to as “Danielle’s Parking Orgy” by a local newspaper, was taken to the city Department of Parking and Traffic based on complaints filed against Robert Kendrick, who lives in a nearby neighborhood and holds 22 parking permits. He is accused of hogging the street with several vehicles that are not in running condition, said department spokeswoman Diana Hammons.

“This was just brought to our attention probably about nine months ago, and it forced us to look at residential parking legislation,” Hammons said. “Twenty-five years ago it wasn’t the case where people owned two cars or three cars — or in some cases 26.”

Calls to Kendrick’s home went unanswered Wednesday.

Hammons said she has not received any specific complaints about Steel’s wagon train of vehicles because the author, who lives in a grand Pacific Heights mansion, also houses some of her cars in an underground parking facility. She has eight children and a number of staff members who work out of her \$8 million estate, which is considered by many to be the most spectacular in the city.

“I have legal permits for all the cars and all of them are either parked in my courtyard or in any of my three garages,” Steel told The Associated Press on Wednesday. “There are never more than three cars on the street.”

The 54-year-old Steel has published 54 best-selling novels, many of which have been adapted to television movies, including “Message from Nam,” “Daddy” and “Kaleidoscope.” Last weekend she hosted

the Star Ball, a \$500-to-\$1,500 a plate fund-raiser at the Ritz Carlton to benefit children with mental illness. Her son, Nick Traina, 19, committed suicide four years ago after struggling for years with his bipolar disorder.

But being a celebrity shouldn’t equal more parking permits, critics say.

Neighbors such as Myron Zimmerman, who has lived across the street from Steel’s estate for 17 years, say it’s too congested for one or two people to have 20-some parking permits.

“There’s just not that many available,” said Zimmerman, who parks his two cars in his garage and does not own a parking permit. “I can’t imagine how the city would allow a single resident to have 22 or 26 spaces. I can’t understand the rationale behind that.”

“Why would people need 22 spaces? That’s not right.”

— MYRON ZIMMERMAN
Neighbor

Zimmerman said if people can afford to own dozens of cars, they should be able to pay for storage somewhere off the street.

“Why would people need 22 spaces?” he said. “That’s not right.”

Hammond said the residential parking policies have been in effect since the 1970s, when the program started as a way to encourage people to leave their cars parked near home during the day and take public transportation to work.

While the permits grant parking in designated areas, nonresidents also are permitted to park there during certain times. Thus, parking is not necessarily guaranteed to permit holders.

There are about 45,000 permits issued citywide, and 98 percent of the holders have fewer than three cars. Hammond said the department is considering raising the cost of the permits, but that is not part of the proposed legislation.

“Our goal is to adjust the issue,” Hammond said, “so we’re not cheap on-street car storage.”

Judge dismisses producer’s lawsuit against DreamWorks

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A federal judge dismissed a \$10 million breach of contract suit against DreamWorks filed by the producer of “An Everlasting Piece,” a political comedy set in Northern Ireland.

The suit was filed by Jerome O’Connor in February 2001. It claimed the studio, which distributed the film, limited its exposure to avoid offending the British government.

At the time, studio co-founder Steven Spielberg was about to be knighted. U.S. District Court Judge Harry L. Hupp ruled Monday there was no breach of contract in the way the studio handled the \$14 million film released in 2000.

The Barry Levinson comedy about two Irish barbers, one Catholic and one Protestant, who try to corner the local hairpiece market, takes satiric stabs at both the Irish Republican Army and the British government.

O’Connor claimed he had an agreement with DreamWorks to show the film in 800 U.S. theaters, but it screened on only 13 and earned a paltry \$75,000 before being shelved.

O’Connor’s attorney, Eamon Dornan, said he intends to appeal the ruling.

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Santa Monica's Daily Calendar



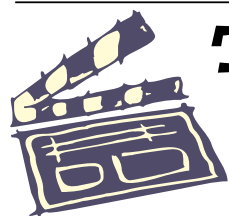
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DOGTOWN AND Z-BOYS
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NATIONAL

Pipe bomber heads to court



Debra Reid/Associated Press

Suspected pipe bomber Luke Helder, 21, is escorted by law enforcement officials from the Washoe County jail in Reno, Nev. on Wednesday. Jail officials said that Helder was on his way to the federal court in Reno following his arrest Tuesday near Fernley, Nev. The FBI said Wednesday that Helder had confessed to planting 18 pipe bombs in rural mailboxes in five states. Six people were injured in the spree.

Electronic exercise belt makers targeted for fraud

BY JENNIFER LOVEN

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — You can't get washboard abs just by strapping an electronic exercise belt around your waist and pushing a button, the government says.

But since several companies have used just such claims to sell an estimated \$100 million worth of the belts to millions of American consumers, the Federal Trade Commission is taking the companies to court.

The agency announced Wednesday it has filed three federal lawsuits, two in Las Vegas and one in San Diego, against the marketers of three ab belts — the AB Energizer, Ab Tronic and Fast Abs.

"These electronic abs gadgets don't do a thing to turn a bulging beer belly into a sleek six-pack stomach," said FTC Chairman Timothy Muris. "Unfortunately, there are no magic pills, potions or pulsators for losing weight and getting into shape. The only winning combination is diet and exercise."

The belts have been sold primarily through heavily aired 30-minute infomercials on national cable television stations; two of the belts also were advertised in shorter commercials and in print.

The infomercials feature photos of trim models, as well as testimony from fitness experts, doctors and users touting how well the belts work to produce sculpted midsections. "Now you can get rock hard abs with no sweat," said one.

The belts cost between \$40 and \$120, earning the companies about \$100 million so far, Muris said.

The advertisements claimed that the devices will cause well-defined abdominal muscles, bring about a loss of fat and inches, and are at least as good as, if not better than, conventional exercise, the FTC said.

The government suits, filed Tuesday, alleged that the claims were false, and

thus the sales fraudulent.

Jeff Knowles, an attorney for Ventura, Calif.-based United Fitness of America and Parsippany, N.J.-based Tristar Products Inc., said their Fast Abs product was pulled from the market — as were all ads — about two months ago because it was not economically competitive.

He said the companies will discuss a settlement with the FTC, but do not believe they defrauded their customers. The devices came with instructions that included suggestions for exercise and healthy diet.

"You have to take things in complete context," Knowles said. "We feel that it's a good product."

The eight companies named in the other two suits could not immediately be reached for comment.

David Fiegall, director of the Food and Drug Administration's Center for Devices and Radiological Health, said there is no evidence such belts can change the shape or appearance of muscle.

The FDA has approved similar devices for sale in the United States, sold as Slender Tone and Compex Sport, but for an entirely different purpose. The electronic muscle stimulation the belts use can help professional athletes or physical therapy patients keep their muscles from tiring as quickly and allow longer exercise, Fiegall said.

The marketers of the belts targeted by the FTC have not applied for FDA approval, he said. His agency is in the process of alerting the companies that their products are not being legally sold. The FDA could eventually force the products to be pulled from the market.

The companies also often failed to provide timely refunds, despite having made "money back guarantees" to consumers, the FTC alleged.

The lawsuits seek refunds for consumers of the belts, and a halt to advertisements containing false claims.

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NATIONAL

ODDS AND ENDS

Man brings stash to drug court

By The Associated Press

UNIONTOWN, Pa. — A suspected drug dealer must not have had anywhere to stash his crack cocaine and marijuana, authorities said, so he brought it with him — to court.

Duron Ford, 19, had a court appearance Monday on drug possession charges. Knowing Ford was due in court, officers approached him in the courthouse to serve a warrant on an unrelated case.

As police closed in on him, Ford reportedly said, "Man, I got the blow on me."

After 10 police officers corralled Ford in the hallway of the Fayette County courthouse, they found he was carrying about two grams of crack cocaine and some marijuana.

"We would hope that they have enough brain cells to know not to bring illicit drugs into the courthouse," said Ford's court-appointed attorney, Jeffrey Witeko.

Ford was in jail after being arraigned on charges of drug possession and resisting arrest.

Bush is Connecticut's 'native' son

By The Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. — He's usually seen as a Texan, but President Bush has been honored as a native son by the Connecticut General Assembly, which called on state transportation officials to install signs pointing travelers to his New Haven birthplace.

Republican Rep. Ruth Fahrbach introduced legislation Tuesday to recognize what she called Connecticut's "important distinction."

The provision was part of a transportation bill that won final approval by the Senate and now goes to Republican Gov. John G. Rowland.

The measure would require the Department of Transportation to place signs on two interstate highways near the New Haven city line. The markers would say, "Welcome to New Haven, Connecticut, Birthplace of George W. Bush, the 43rd President of the United States."

Bush, a Republican, was born in New Haven when his father, the former president, was an economics student at Yale just after returning from service in World War II.

The president's official biography omits his birthplace and says he grew up in Houston and Midland, Texas. The only reference to Connecticut in his official biography is his graduation from Yale University in 1968.

Eagle gets carried away by wind

By The Associated Press

MONTPELIER, Vt. — An eagle soared way out of range at a falconry school, and now the public is being asked to help find the wayward bird.

The British School of Falconry in the southern Vermont town of Manchester asked for help Tuesday in finding a 19-year-old tawny eagle that disappeared on Friday.

Elsie was out for her daily exercise flight when she disappeared, probably blown to the north by strong winds, said Rob Waite, the school's lead instructor and master falconer.

"She was caught by a gust of wind and got carried away," Waite said.

The school teaches the ancient sport of falconry — using birds of prey in hunting — and Elsie's job was to demonstrate the techniques of the sport to students.

Elsie was described as chestnut-brown, with a 6-foot wingspan. She was wearing a leather strap and bell on each leg — the strap for tethering and the bell for helping people find the bird when she went out of sight.

Waite said Elsie had occasionally disappeared and returned in the past but "has never been gone for this length of time. ... She may have gotten blown far enough away that she couldn't find her way back here."

He said the school had offered a \$1,000 award for the bird's safe return.

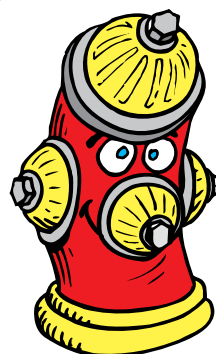
Pot dumps out of truck on highway

By The Associated Press

ONTARIO, Calif. — Cucumber boxes — filled with tons of marijuana — spilled from a produce truck that overturned as it exited a freeway, police said.

After the truck dumped its entire load of cucumber boxes, Ontario police found the boxes concealed nearly 5,000 pounds of marijuana.

Police are searching for two men who fled from the truck, which was involved in a hit-and-run accident shortly before it overturned. Nobody was hurt in the accident.



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SPORTS

Spurs now have homecourt advantage over Lakers

BY T.A. BADGER
Associated Press Writer

SAN ANTONIO — The San Antonio Spurs squandered decent fourth-quarter leads twice in Los Angeles. The first time turned into a tough loss. They barely hung to win the second.

Late, gut-churning lapses aside, the Spurs have several reasons to feel good heading into Friday's Game 3 of the Western Conference semifinals against the two-time defending champion Lakers.

Tuesday's 88-85 victory at the Staples Center showed the many doubters that San Antonio is capable of something it couldn't do at all last year: beat the Lakers in the postseason.

And with the best-of-seven series even, the Spurs now have the homecourt edge. Three of the remaining five games would be played at the Alamodome, where the home team has lost only once since February.

"We gave away (Game 1) and we almost gave away this one," Spurs forward Tim Duncan said after Game 2. "But we found a way to stick through it all the way until the end. ... We're ready to go home and play well, play a lot better than we did tonight."

San Antonio had a 21-point lead in the first half Tuesday, and were up 85-74 with 6:23 remaining. The Spurs made only one field goal and one free throw after that.

Duncan is expected to be officially revealed Thursday as the league's Most Valuable Player, giving the 30,000-plus San Antonio fans reason to be extra loud on Friday.

The chances continue to improve that center David Robinson, seen only in street clothes thus far in the series, may finally be back to go against Shaquille O'Neal.

"It would be huge," Duncan said. "When Dave comes back, it will be an incredible boost for us."

Teammates concur, but Spurs coach Gregg Popovich offers a different viewpoint.

"I'm not sure it would be that big a deal," Popovich said Wednesday in San Antonio. "We've been without him for a month, and we've gotten used to being without him."

The 7-foot-1 Robinson aggravated a disc in his lower back late in the regular season, and played only a few

minutes in the first-round series against Seattle. Team officials say his back feels better, and that he's strengthening his right leg to overcome nerve irritation caused by the back injury.

While he wasn't in uniform Tuesday, teammates say Robinson used his savvy and experience to contribute to the win.

"He was like Nostradamus out there," Malik Rose said. "He was predicting runs, 'They're going to make a run, this is going to happen, that is going to happen, we

have to do this, we have to do that,' and it happened. We took heed to what he was saying."

Popovich also downplayed any lift that comes from playing at home.

"In the playoffs, all of the teams are so good now," he said. "They've all done well on the road, so people are prepared no matter where they play."

Lakers guard Kobe Bryant, who pulled Los Angeles back into Tuesday's game by scoring 20 points in the second half, said crowds count.



National Basketball Association playoff schedule

By The Associated Press

CONFERENCE SEMIFINALS — EDT (Best-of-7)

Saturday, May 4

Sacramento 108, Dallas 91, Sacramento leads series 1-0

Sunday, May 5

New Jersey 99, Charlotte 93, New Jersey leads series 1-0

Detroit 96, Boston 84, Detroit leads series 1-0

L.A. Lakers 86, San Antonio 80, L.A. Lakers lead series 1-0

Monday, May 6

Dallas 110, Sacramento 102, series tied 1-1

Tuesday, May 7

New Jersey 102, Charlotte 88, New Jersey leads series 2-0

San Antonio 88, L.A. Lakers 85, series tied 1-1

Wednesday, May 8

Boston 85, Detroit 77, series tied 1-1

Thursday, May 9

New Jersey at Charlotte, 7 p.m.

Sacramento at Dallas, 9:30 p.m.

Friday, May 10

Detroit at Boston, 7 p.m.

L.A. Lakers at San Antonio, 9:30 p.m.

Saturday, May 11

Sacramento at Dallas, 3:30 p.m.

Sunday, May 12

New Jersey at Charlotte, 12:30 p.m.

Detroit at Boston, 3 p.m.

L.A. Lakers at San Antonio, 5:30 p.m.

Monday, May 13

Dallas at Sacramento, 9 p.m., if necessary

Tuesday, May 14

Boston at Detroit, 8 p.m., if necessary

San Antonio at L.A. Lakers, TBA, if necessary

Wednesday, May 15

Charlotte at New Jersey, TBA, if necessary

Sacramento at Dallas, TBA, if necessary

Thursday, May 16

Detroit at Boston, TBA, if necessary

L.A. Lakers at San Antonio, TBA, if necessary

Friday, May 17

New Jersey at Charlotte, 8 p.m., if necessary

Saturday, May 18

Dallas at Sacramento, TBA, if necessary

San Antonio at L.A. Lakers, TBA, if necessary

Sunday, May 19

Charlotte at New Jersey, TBA, if necessary

Boston at Detroit, TBA, if necessary



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- 14th and Santa Monica Boulevard
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- Arizona Avenue and Fifth Street
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- Broadway and 10th Street
- Colorado Avenue and Second Street
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- Lincoln Boulevard and Pico Boulevard
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- Main Street and Ocean Park
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- Montana Avenue and Euclid Street
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INTERNATIONAL



Arafat speech televised, vows to fight terrorism

BY DAFNA LINZER

Associated Press Writer

JERUSALEM — A beleaguered Yasser Arafat vowed in a televised speech Wednesday to unleash his security services to prevent terrorist attacks, hours after the Islamic militant group Hamas claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing that killed 15 Israelis.

"I gave my orders and directions to all the Palestinian security forces to confront and prevent all terror attacks against Israeli civilians from any Palestinian side or parties," Arafat said on Palestinian TV.

President Bush called Arafat's statement against terrorism an "incredibly positive sign," and he urged Israel to consider the consequences of its response to the suicide attack.

"You've got to want peace to achieve peace," Bush said in Washington, just before meeting with Jordan's King Abdullah II.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon returned home from talks in Washington to determine Israel's response.

He held an emergency Israeli Cabinet meeting early Thursday to consider proposals, which could include an offensive in the Gaza Strip and Arafat's expulsion.

Palestinian officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said they expected Israel to strike at the Gaza Strip, home base of Hamas, which claimed responsibility for Tuesday's bombing and scores of other attacks during the past 19 months of fighting.

Sheik Ahmed Yassin, the Hamas spiritual leader, told The Associated Press in an interview Wednesday his group would continue attacks against Israel. "Israel's action will not go unpunished. They have harmed civilians and so their civilians will be harmed," he said. Israel arrested two Hamas leaders in the West Bank on Wednesday.

The densely populated Gaza Strip was spared during Israel's recent military operation in the West Bank, launched March 29 in response to suicide bombings that killed dozens of Israelis.

Defense Ministry spokesman Yarden Vatikay declined to comment on the pos-

sibility of an incursion into Gaza.

"Where there are terrorists, we will act and are acting now," he said. "There are no limits on us."

The bombing Tuesday night shattered a widespread sense among Israelis that the recent incursions into Palestinian cities had significantly curtailed the Palestinians' ability to carry out attacks in Israel.

It was followed 12 hours later by a failed suicide bombing in which a Palestinian set off explosives at a highway intersection near the northern city of Haifa. The assailant was wounded, but caused no injuries to bystanders. Fearing the bomber might have additional explosives, Israel's bomb squad used a robotic arm to drag him across the highway before police approached.

At Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity, a standoff that began April 2 appeared to be close to an end as the sides held talks early Thursday to discuss the fate of 13 suspected Palestinians militants Israel had hoped to deport to Italy.

Italy refused to accept the deal and on Wednesday, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators worked on a new plan whereby the 13 would move to a temporary location until a country agrees to take them in. Twenty-six others would be sent to Gaza and the rest would go free.

Kristin Schurr, a New York activist who is inside the church, said the mood was festive. "People are thinking that maybe this is coming to an end and a deal has been struck," she said.

The attacks did not appear to derail the Bethlehem deal.

Sharon, who has held Arafat responsible for the attacks, said before beginning the emergency Cabinet session that "Israel will act strongly. The battle continues and will continue, until all those who believe that they can make gains through the use of terror will cease to exist."

Education Minister Limor Livnat, who traveled with Sharon, said "it is very possible that in the end, there will be no choice and it will be necessary to expel Arafat."

It would be extremely difficult to



Karel Prinsloo/Associated Press

Police officers look through the carnage at a pool hall which was destroyed during a bomb attack in Rishon Letzion, near Tel Aviv, Israel, on Wednesday. The suicide attack killed more than 15 people and injured at least 60, late Tuesday.

deport Arafat, however. Surrounded by a loyal protective guard, he's vowed never to leave. Any move to force his departure could inflame the Arab world to a degree not seen in the 19-month conflict — especially if the 72-year-old Palestinian leader were to be harmed.

A senior Israeli official said Sharon and Bush discussed moving the Palestinian leader into a ceremonial position to make way for new leadership.

In Washington, Secretary of State Colin Powell said the bombing had endangered hopes for ending months of violence that has claimed over 1,600 Palestinian lives and nearly 500 on the Israeli side.

"Every time one of these events happens, it takes us off a course we were on for a while," Powell said. "It's a course we ultimately have to get back to. ... At the end of the day, we have to find a political

solution."

In a speech broadcast in Arabic across the Arab world, Arafat promised to take action against Palestinian militants — but qualified his statements by insisting his security forces needed help.

"I call on the U.S. government, President Bush and the international community to provide the support and needed immunity for the Palestinian security forces, whose infrastructure has been destroyed by the Israeli occupation, so that they can carry out and implement their orders ... to completely stop any terror attempt targeting Israeli civilians or Palestinian civilians, and to prevent using terror as a political way to achieve their goals," Arafat said.

Bush said Tuesday he would send CIA Director George Tenet to help build a Palestinian security force to fight terrorism.

American fugitive arrested in Vienna, to be extradited

By The Associated Press

VIENNA, Austria — An Austrian appeals court ruled Wednesday that a New York businessman sentenced in absentia to 845 years in prison for a scheme that bilked millions from an insurance company should be extradited to the United States.

Sholam Weiss, a millionaire from Monsey, N.Y., was arrested in Vienna in October 2000. In 1999, a federal jury in Orlando, Fla., had convicted him of pocketing \$125 million from the National Heritage Life Insurance

Co. Weiss fled the United States before sentencing.

Earlier, a different panel of judges on the same Austrian appeals court had refused to extradite Weiss, instead saying he should be tried in Austria, where the maximum sentence would be 10 years.

But on Wednesday, the court "corrected" its opinion, Alois Ramoser, the high court president, told the Austria Press Agency.

"The extradition is not contrary to human rights in this case," he was quoted as saying. He did not elaborate.

The decision cannot formally be appealed, but Weiss' attorney, Manfred Ainedter, said he hoped to block the extradition.

Besides Weiss, six others were convicted or pleaded guilty in the plot to skim \$400 million from National Heritage. The scheme caused the Orlando company's 1994 collapse. Many of its 25,000 customers lost their life savings.

A date for his extradition has not been set by the justice minister.

Teenage gunman wanted classmates to make brutal film

BY STEPHEN GRAHAM

Associated Press Writer

BERLIN — The German teen-ager who gunned down 16 people at his old school planned to make a brutal film with his classmates and had a stash of violent videos at his home, an investigator said Wednesday.

The comments by police director Rainer Grube came just as the government announced plans to tighten youth protection laws to better shield minors from videos and computer games depicting extreme violence.

According to Grube, 19-year-old Robert Steinhäuser had proposed shooting a film in which the protagonist takes revenge on a gang for killing his girlfriend. The victims were to be executed with a gunshot to the head. Later, the avenger would kill himself.

The outline of the film bears chilling parallels to the rampage at the high school in the eastern city of Erfurt.

Steinhäuser, a loner who had been expelled from the school the previous fall, shot dead two students, 13 teachers and a police officer in a 20-minute rampage last month at the Johann Gutenberg

Gymnasium before turning the gun on himself.

Steinhäuser's parents told Monday's edition of the Der Spiegel news magazine of their son's obsession with violence and computer games.

At a news conference in Erfurt on Wednesday, Grube said police had found 12 videos containing "dark, blood-dripping and violence-worshipping films."

Steinhäuser's fascination with violence and a gun-club membership that allowed him to buy weapons have prompted a national debate about the social pressures on young Germans and

how to prevent a similar tragedy.

The government has proposed tightening already strict gun control laws, and Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's Cabinet on Wednesday approved a quick overhaul of youth protection codes.

Planned changes include a rating system for computer games that would classify them according to content, family minister Christine Bergmann said. Such a system is already in place for films.

Tobacco and alcohol advertising would also be restricted under the bill, which the government said should come into force in the fall.

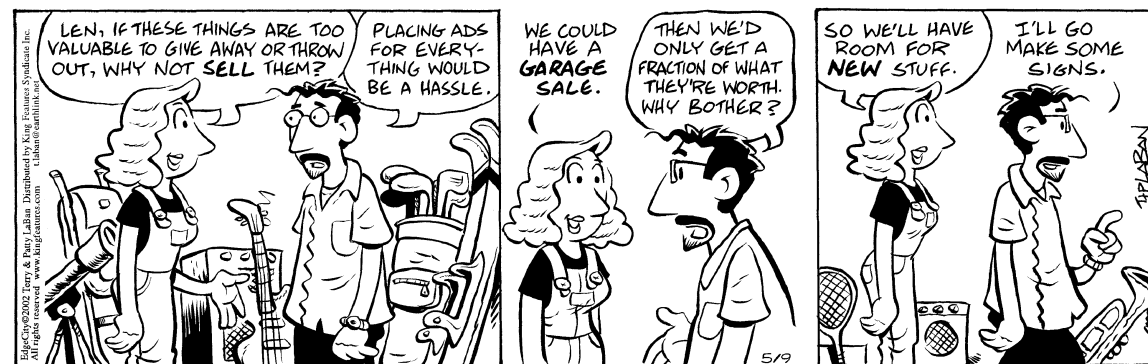


COMICS

The Dinette Set by Julie Larson



by TERRY & PATTY LABAN



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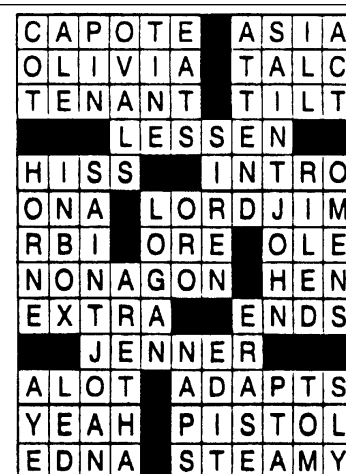
By Russ Wallace



"You're getting sleepy ... veery sleepy ... veeery ... zzzzzz."

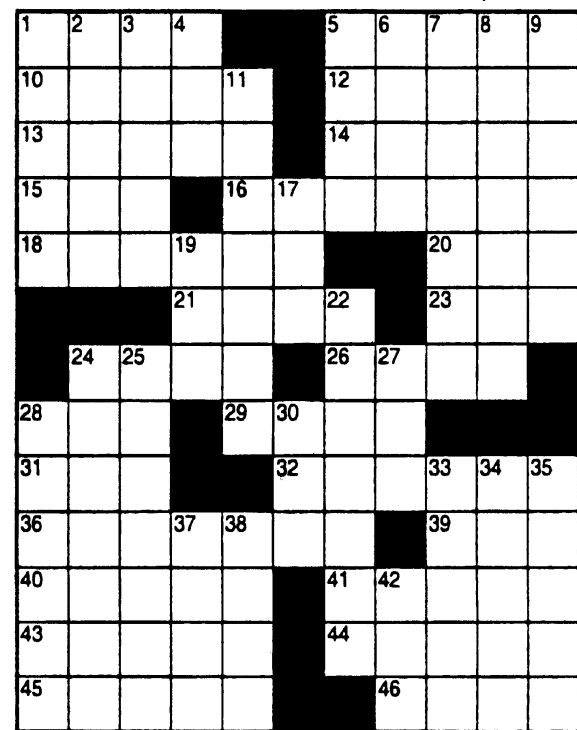
CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH



Yesterday's answer

- ACROSS**
- 1 Deep sleep
 - 5 Summer spots for some
 - 10 Suspect's defense
 - 12 Removed
 - 13 Female fox
 - 14 Bottled spirit
 - 15 Time for preparation
 - 16 Home of the Blue Jays
 - 18 Calm
 - 20 Bankroll
 - 21 Doting
 - 23 Horace's "Poetica"
 - 24 Univ. mil. program
 - 26 Wrong
 - 28 Soup buy
 - 29 Band-leader Sammy
 - 31 Tiny worker
 - 32 Beer hall containers
 - 36 Learned one
 - 39 Japanese drama
 - 40 Motif
 - 41 Washing-ton neighbor
- DOWN**
- 43 One of Lear's daughters
 - 44 Wine grape
 - 45 Scents
 - 46 Sunday seats
 - 1 Caverns
 - 2 Green hue
 - 3 Not uniform
 - 4 Playwright
 - 5 Shrewd
 - 6 Copied
 - 7 Famed racehorse
 - 8 Election year event
 - 9 Horses
 - 11 Available
 - 17 Barbie's beau
 - 19 Toward the wake
 - 22 Brief vacation
 - 24 Had a spread
 - 25 Busy
 - 27 Lilliputian
 - 28 Cuban leader
 - 30 Simile words
 - 33 Ludicrous
 - 34 Absolutely not
 - 35 Bar orders
 - 37 Actor Epps
 - 38 Camera part
 - 42 Party staple



5-9

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By Dave Whammond



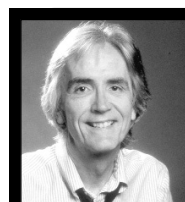
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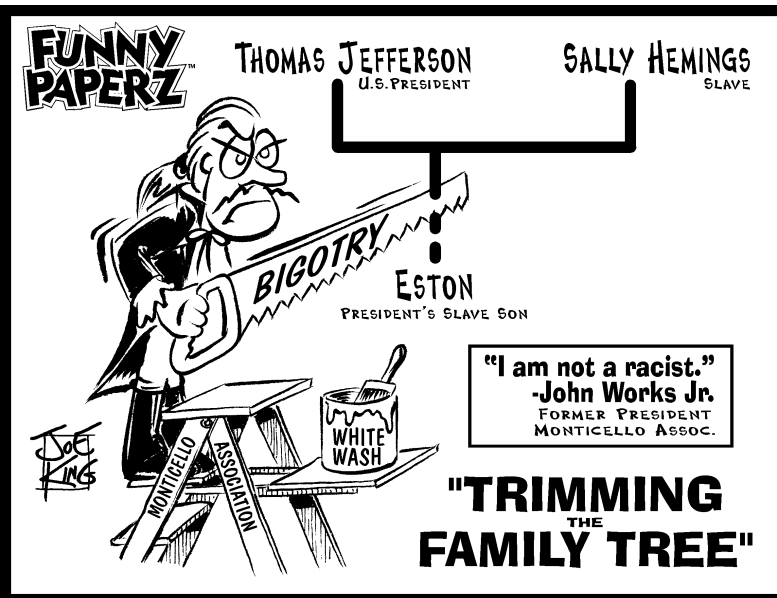


NEWS OF THE WEIRD

by Chuck Shepard

Edible fungus makes its debut in US

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BACK PAGE

Berkeley celebrates 50th anniversary of 'Beowulf'

By The Associated Press

BERKELEY — It's an event that may have "the cool of scratched LPs, plaid polyester pants or schnauzer-shaped salt and pepper shakers," frets organizer Pat Schwieterman.

Still, the read-aloud "Beowulf" marathon is an epic gathering, especially this year as it celebrates its 50th anniversary, more or less (hey, things got a little fuzzy in the '60s), at the University of California, Berkeley.

"Part of what's so entertaining about the 'Beowulf' marathon is exactly the fact that there's nothing traditionally entertaining about it — just a bunch of people reading in a language none of them can really understand ... for hours," says Schwieterman, a graduate student in English.

First, a primer for those who don't have "The Medievalist's Handbook" on their night stands.

"Beowulf" is the first known major poem written in a European vernacular language, Old English to be precise. It was spoken long before that, so it's not clear exactly when it was composed. The only known manuscript is a 1,000-year-old battered relic at the British Library that was licked by the flames of a 1731 fire.

The story follows the adventures of Beowulf, a Scandinavian hero who saves the Danes from a man-eating monster named Grendel and from Grendel's even more unpleasant mother. The warrior becomes a leader and then, at the end of his life, musters his strength for one last stand against a fierce, gold-guarding dragon. His allies turn tail, save for Wiglaf, the valiant youngster who helps Beowulf win his last battle.

"It's a poem about heroism that takes the hero seriously but also it's not ironic, which is such a relief in the 21st century," says Michael Drout, a "Beowulf" fan and assistant professor of English at Wheaton College in Massachusetts.

Drout, partly inspired by the Berkeley event, helped organize a read-aloud "Beowulf" event at the International Congress on Medieval Studies held at

Western Michigan University this month. Drout wasn't too sure what reception he would get but found himself "absolutely swamped with e-mail."

The No. 1 query: "Can I bring mead?"

"It's a stereotype, but an accurate stereotype of the Anglo-Saxonist," Drout says cheerfully.

Schwieterman, who doesn't drink, will admit to no more than a "certain conviviality" at the Berkeley event. These "Beowulf" readings can get rather loopy.

"Part of what's so entertaining about the 'Beowulf' marathon is exactly the fact that there's nothing traditionally entertaining about it."

— PAT SCHWIETERMAN
Frets organizer

One professor who "was apparently quite a ham," would act out portions of the story as the reading progressed, complete with props. "He would have little packets of ketchup ready that he would pop at the right moment when someone had just taken an ax blow and just fall flat to the floor."

Melodrama can be tricky, though, especially for those with an imperfect grasp of Old English.

A few years ago, a participant who read with more style than comprehension thought he was reading Beowulf's big moment, "so he delivered it in this booming, stentorian voice. After, everyone was chuckling and it was, 'What? What?'"

The poor fellow had been reading the part of the Danish queen.

Chuckles are allowed at the marathon; smirks are frowned on. "I won't say that nobody has ever smirked but it's certainly not encouraged," says Schwieterman.

"The marathon is a thoroughly democratic event."

Some marathons have crossed over to anarchy.

One year, the event fell on May 5 — the Mexican holiday of Cinco de Mayo — so in recognition, organizers started the reading in Spanish.

"Then other people insisted on reading in French and Italian and German languages. So we had the famous multilingual 'Beowulf' that year. After a few hundred lines, all but one stubborn participant settled down and read the Old English. One person persisted in reading in French 'til the end."

This year's event starts Friday at 6:30 p.m., and is expected to take the usual four hours.

It's the 50th anniversary, based on accounts of a 1952 event, but it may not be the 50th marathon — it has been said that anyone who remembers the 1960s wasn't there and that appears to be true for "Beowulf" marathon history. No one seems to know much about whether the marathon was a regular event during the 1960s, a time when students were campaigning for Free Speech and against the Vietnam War in thoroughly modern English.

Schwieterman is hanging his hat on the 1952 event. Beyond that, he says, "I don't know and I don't care."

Attendance has swelled in recent years, particularly after a recent translation by Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney cracked the best-seller lists.

In the mid-1990s, as few as five people showed up. Last year, there were close to 50. This year, Schwieterman is thinking about rationing the poem's 3,182 lines; the usual system is to have people sit in a circle and read until they get tired.

The secret to the poem's appeal is that "frankly, it's a masterpiece of literature," says Schwieterman. "It really is brilliant. There's a musicality to the language, a vigor in the alliterative lines that you just don't have in modern English language poetry. That's one of the things that reading the poem out loud brings out — this rugged music the poem has."

Beautiful, but strange.

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