

FREE

WEDNESDAY, MAY 15, 2002

Volume 1, Issue 158

Santa Monica Daily Press

Picked fresh daily. 100% organic news.

Polo anyone?



Seth Kotok/Special to the Daily Press

Polo season has begun at Will Rogers State Park. The games will be played every weekend through September.

New shuttle proposed for Santa Monica Mountains

BY ANDREW H. FIXMER
Daily Press Staff Writer

It could be less of a hike to the Santa Monica Mountains by the end of the summer.

The National Parks Service is proposing a shuttle bus that would loop through the Santa Monica Mountains, linking parking areas with recreational areas.

Plans for the service are nearly complete and the operation could be up and running by fall, park officials said.

The shuttle service is only the beginning of what park officials hope to achieve. They envision a ferry service in the next couple years that would connect

Santa Monica and Malibu Piers with Point Dume Beach.

"It would be a beautiful view of the mountains from the water," said National Parks Service spokesman Charles Taylor. "It would probably be the cheapest date in Los Angeles."

The shuttle bus service was started with \$250,000 in federal, state and county funding.

"We were looking for transportation alternatives in the mountains," Taylor said. "Part of it is that we want to relieve some of the congestion on the roads."

See SHUTTLE, page 4



The proposed shuttle route is indicated by the dotted line on the left.

SMC funding slashed by Davis' budget cuts

College's counseling program loses \$360K in state funding

BY ANDREW H. FIXMER
Daily Press Staff Writer

Gov. Gray Davis' revised state budget will have a disastrous impact on student services at Santa Monica College, officials said.

Davis announced Tuesday he would slash funding for counseling services at all of California's community colleges by \$26.8 million.

Santa Monica College will lose about \$360,000 for the counseling and student services it provides.

"I think we really try to be all things to all people, but I think those days are over," said Brenda Johnson, the college's dean of counseling services. "Now we will have to target our services to specific groups, knowing that some students will fall through the cracks."

Student services help ensure that students are placed in the proper classes; provides them an orientation to the college, and gives them an opportunity to meet with counselors to map out their academic paths.

"... We will have to target our services to specific groups, knowing that some students will fall through the cracks."

— BRENDA JOHNSON
SMC dean of counseling

The drastic reduction in funding will cause the counseling service department to shrink the hours it's open, as well as scale back the number of counseling sessions students are offered.

Johnson said the department will have

See FUNDING, page 5

City gets ready to tear into Main Street sewer system

Plans laid out for half-year construction project

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON
Daily Press Staff Writer

It just wouldn't be Santa Monica without continuous construction projects in the works.

Next on tap for significant disruption is Main Street — the site where a six-month-long sewer repair project is being planned.

Main Street merchants were invited to a community meeting Monday to hear about the city's plans to repair sewers severely damaged in the 1994 Northridge earthquake.

But only three business representatives showed up. Meanwhile, other Main Street merchants are panicking because they think the construction will have devastating repercussions to their businesses.

To avoid disrupting business along Main Street during the busy summer, work is scheduled to begin in September, said the city's consultant Vikki Zale. She added that work will cease during the hol-

iday season and resume in January.

Zale said now is the time for business owners to offer suggestions about the project because conditions can be written into the agreement with the contractor, who has not yet been chosen.

"A lot of people don't show up to these meetings, which is unfortunate," Zale said. "The city takes these (projects) very seriously."

Gary Gordon, a Main Street Merchants Association representative, said work will be done at 38 different manholes from Pico Boulevard to the southern city limits.

Gordon, who attended Monday's meeting, said the city was responsive to some of their suggestions, but merchants are still wary.

"Some people, despite assurances, think it's going to be crummy," he said. "It's going to be difficult."

Many Main Street merchants were under the impression that construction in their business district was almost complete, since main sewer lines were just replaced

See MAIN STREET, page 4

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Santa Monica's Daily Calendar

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

Shiatsu Massage School of California is hosting Kung Fu classes for advanced students from 4:15 to 5:15 every Wednesday. Suggested donation per class is \$4.00. Free class for first-time visitors.

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Want to be on the A-List?
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★★★★★-Dynamic ★★★★★-Positive ★★★★★-Average
 ★★-So-so ★-Difficult

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

★★★ Unexpected developments stop you dead in your tracks. Work with others carefully when dealing with matters about the homestead. Afterward, you can resume what had been on your "to do" list. Confirm any meetings. Misunderstandings run rampant. Tonight: Happy to be at home.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

★★★★ Speak your mind, especially in the face of a reversal or sudden change. Not everything is as you think. Consider upset as an opportunity for you to gain. Discussions allow more insight. Do be careful with a money matter in the next few weeks. Tonight: Swap war stories over munchies.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20)

★★★ News from a distance sends you into a bit of a tizzy. Information that comes forth could have long-term financial implications. Think about what you want. A financial matter takes precedence. You could be more confused than you realize. Tonight: Crazy seems to ensue.

CANCER (June 21-July 22)

★★★★ When hitting a snafu, don't hesitate to head in another direction. Your sense of humor creates a lot more possibilities than you realize. Others respond, and nervousness falls to the way-side. Do whatever you need to do to relax. Tonight: Beam in what you want.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)

★★★ Allow another to express his or her feelings. You need to deal with the unexpected. Consider an opportunity. Take another look at a situation. You will find that your perspective changes dramatically. Be careful when mixing finances with friendship in the next few days. Tonight: Take a break.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

★★★ Aim for more of what you want, though you will have to side step a hassle or two. Don't let your nerves cause a mistake or unneeded problem, especially in the next few weeks. You might want to discuss a change involving career goals. Tonight: Go with the moment.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)

★★★★ Think in terms of what you want. Think through a decision that involves your personal life as well as one who lives at a distance. Confusion surrounds information right now. Double-check your sources, especially at work. Tonight: Work as late as need be.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)

★★★★ You can drive a hard bargain when you want to. Use your ability to read between the lines with others. Seek out information that you might deem as significant. News from a partner and/or friend could startle you. Tonight: Catch a movie.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

★★★★ Work with another and get to the root of a problem. Someone might dump an unusual amount of information on you in the next few weeks. Take your time making financial decisions, as much as you would like to move past a matter or be supportive of another. Tonight: Listen to a loved one.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

★★★★ Deal with others openly, looking for solutions. Chaos could ensue where you least expect it. What might be expected from your work could change dramatically. Deal carefully with an important association in your life. Tonight: Where the people are.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

★★★★ Your behavior might surprise a loved one. Think through a decision involving a key relationship or budding romance in the next few weeks. If you can, avoid any impulsiveness with others. Expect a blast from your past in the near future. Tonight: Do something ultimately relaxing.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)

★★★★ Allow more of your imagination in your work. Lighten up about a family member or key associate who might be off-kilter or will be in the near future. Chill out and consider what might be best for all of you. Take an overview. Tonight: Let your more childlike side dominate.

CORRECTION — In the May 14 edition, proposed fare increases for the Big Blue Bus were incorrect. The Line 10 Express Regular would be raised from \$1.25 to \$1.75 and for that same route, seniors and Medicare cardholders' current fare of 40 cents would be increased to 60 cents. The Line 10 Express for the disabled would remain 25 cents.

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LOCAL



Caught on film



Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press

Ever heard 'Don't swim near the pipe?' This may be the reason. Urban runoff can be especially bad at Bay Street, where water quality is normally below standard.

More open space preserved?

Voters may be asked to assess themselves

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — About 60,000 property owners may be asked by mail ballot next month to assess themselves up to \$40 each year for the next 30 years to raise money for purchase of open space and brush clearance.

The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, acting through its Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, has tentatively scheduled a mail-in election for June, seeking approval of property owners from suburban Woodland Hills to Griffith Park.

"There are several large parcels the conservancy would like to purchase for open space, and this is seen as the most effective

way to do it," conservancy spokeswoman Dash Stolarz said. "We won't do it unless the people who live within the conservancy boundaries approve it."

More than 1,300 properties are available for purchase in the area, an engineer's report said. In addition, the plan calls for using up to \$160,000 each year for brush clearance.

Conservancy executive director Joe Edmiston said assessment district discussions began about two years ago.

"There was a lot of talk after Proposition 12 passed about how that state money should be used for large projects," said Edmiston, referring to the \$2.1 billion park bond issue approved by state voters in 2000.

"At the same time, a lot of residents were looking for us to buy smaller properties for open space and this idea was suggested to us," he said.

No lifeguard cuts for beaches

By staff and wire reports

The state's anticipated decision to cut the number lifeguards this summer won't affect beaches in Los Angeles.

Los Angeles County Lifeguard Chief Mike Fraizer said the cuts only pertain to state beaches, not county and city beaches, which encompass the coast between the Ventura County line to Long Beach.

"All beaches and coastal waters owned or operated by LA County will continue to provide optimal public service and safety," he said. "It's a state issue, not a LA County issue. All indications are status quo."

The Department of Parks and Recreation is considering a 20 percent budget cut in July that would have 120 fewer seasonal lifeguards hired compared to a normal

summertime increase of 600 lifeguards.

The reduction is an effort to help offset the state's estimated \$22 billion budget shortfall.

"You don't crunch down on firefighters, police or lifeguards when there are economic hard times," said John Santos, a spokesman in San Diego for the California State Lifeguard Association. "Those are the wrong cuts to make."

Last year, 17 people drowned at beaches patrolled by state lifeguards, who made a record 7,400 rescues. During the same period, attendance at California's 267 state parks and beaches increased 30 percent to 90 million visitors.

A proposal to cut the number of lifeguards at California's state beaches, lakes and reservoirs could compromise public safety, a state lifeguard association has warned.



The recent south and southwest swells have peaked, but will provide ample energy for today. Southwest exposures offer head-high sets and inconsistent waist-to-shoulder-high surf. Northwest exposures break steeper but smaller, backed by a strong west and northwest afternoon wind swell. Water temperatures remain in the high 50s.

Expect enough of a post-peak, southerly swell Thursday to keep LA's beaches in 2-3-4' waves. Sets will prove inconsistent, but conditions look clean thanks in part to subsiding offshore winds.

(Information compiled by Jesse Haley.)

Location	Wednesday	Thursday	Water Quality
County Line	3-4'/Fair+	2-4'/Good	A+
Zuma	3-4'/Good	3-4'/Good	A+
Surfrider	2-4'/Fair	2-4'/Fair	C-F
Topanga	3-4'/Fair	2-4'/Fair	B
Breakwater	2-4'/Fair	2-3'/Fair	A+
El Porto	3-4'/Poor+	2-3'/Fair	A+



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Campaign season has begun in Santa Monica. Last week residents learned about a November ballot measure that would rewrite how people are elected to the city council. If approved, the measure would allow residents to vote for one city council member from their neighborhood, instead of all seven who run at-large currently. It also would require that the mayor be elected by the people, instead of being appointed by council

members. Supporters of the measure think certain neighborhoods, like the city's east side, are not represented.

This week Q-Line wants to know, "Do you feel adequately represented by your city council? Why or why not?"

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LOCAL □ STATE

New shuttle loops around Santa Monica mountains

SHUTTLE, from page 1

The shuttle would start near the Malibu Pier, head north on Malibu Canyon Road, then east on Mulholland Highway to Kanan Durno Road. The bus would then head south to the Pacific Coast Highway, which would go back to the pier.

Stops are planned at both ends of the Backbone Trail, Tapla Park, Malibu Creek State Park, Rocky Oaks and at Zuma and Point Dume beaches — to name a few.

The buses, which park officials believe would carry as many as 10,000 passengers a day during the summer months, would run on compressed natural gas. They will be equipped to carry mountain bikes, surfboards, sea kayaks and other equipment.

The service would initially use four buses, providing hourly service in both directions. Because of overlapping bus routes, the maximum wait between shuttles would be between 30-45 minutes, park officials said.

Initial fares for the bus would be \$2 per trip or \$5 for an unlimited travel pass. Kids would ride for free and anyone who parks in a county or state parking lot would receive a credit toward their bus fare.

The National Parks Service's expanded bus routes already have been planned to connect existing bus stops in the San Fernando Valley to bus stops in Santa Monica.

"The idea is that we wanted to plug into public transportation," Taylor said. "Right now there isn't a very good way to get into the park by public transportation, and we're hoping to help solve part of that."

The Malibu City Council reviewed the plan on Monday. City officials say they support the plan, but want a few added stops such as the oldest house in Malibu, one of the city's landmarks.

"We just think there are features of the city that should be included in the park's routes," said Chuck Bergson, Malibu's public works director. "They are trying to highlight the ocean and mountain recreation areas, and we believe those (sites) should be included as part of that."

Taylor said the shuttle service would act almost as a tour guide, by providing information about what activities are available in the park.

"It's an experience for people who want to do something in the park but don't know what to do, or where to start," Taylor said. "It's like a long-guided tour."

City wants merchants' feedback on construction

MAIN STREET, from page 1

and work on Neilson Way went longer than expected.

Like one merchant said at the meeting, "The whole town is suffering from construction burn-out," adding that city officials have jackhammers running through their veins.

Merchants are concerned about how the construction will affect parking, traffic flow along Main Street, aesthetics and dust. But what they are most worried about is how their customers will get to their stores.

"We need to know that Main Street will be open for business," Gordon said, adding construction can literally put a store out of business. "It can be really detrimental."

Zale said the city will keep the construction areas to a minimum, possibly by setting up a staging area off of Main Street, as well as making sure customers know where to park by posting the proper signs. The city may even provide free, or discounted parking in a designated lot for Main Street customers during the construction.

Because the work is centralized around one manhole at a time and is mostly underground, the impact should be minimal, Zale said.

For the merchants' trouble, the city has budgeted \$225,000 to put toward improvements to Main Street, which will be discussed on June 20.

She added that if merchants have concerns or suggestions, they should contact her at 1-800-200-8340.

"Obviously they know their street better than we do," Zale said. "We're listening to them."

New assembly room gives jurors creature comforts

By The Associated Press

SANTA ANA — Receiving a jury summons in the mail may not be such bad news anymore for people living in Orange County.

On Monday, court officials unveiled a new jury assembly room designed to appease potential jurors. Faux leather couches and ergonomically designed chairs replace bench and floor seating.

There are two dozen workspaces equipped with modem connections so prospective jurors can keep themselves busy. A network of seven large-screen televisions and a video projection system also have been installed to make the waiting game less grueling.

"The best thing is that people can get work done when they're waiting," said jury

candidate Lillian French, 42, of Santa Ana.

The upgrades to the state's largest jury assembly room — it can hold as many as 600 people — cost more than \$1.5 million.

Court officials across the state have found it difficult to attract people for jury service. About 10 million people are called to jury duty in California every year. Only about 25 percent of those contacted actually appear, reschedule or found ineligible to serve.

In Orange County, the response is much better. Of the 800,000 residents who are asked to serve each year, 69 percent either respond or show up.

"We're hoping that once word gets out about the new assembly room, we'll see more people showing up," said Thu Nguyen, the court's jury manager.

STATE



Davis plans to fill \$23.6 billion hole with taxes

BY ALEXA HAUSSLER
Associated Press Writer

SACRAMENTO — Gov. Gray Davis unveiled a plan Tuesday to fill in an estimated \$23.6 billion budget shortfall with deep cuts and tax increases, despite insisting for months that he had no plans to raise taxes.

The shortfall is almost double that predicted in January and amounts to one-third of the state general fund. Davis blamed the economic aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and a downturn in the stock market.

"This budget reflects my view, and the views of most economists, that some time in the next 12 months, California will experience a recovery," Davis said.

Davis wants to cut \$7.6 billion, including deep reductions in health programs and aid to local government.

He is calling for a temporary increase to state vehicle license fees and a cigarette tax increase. With the cuts, Davis' plan also includes putting off programs until better fiscal times and creative shifting of education dollars to fulfill the state's minimum funding guarantee for schools.

Now, motorists pay about a third of the vehicle license fee that they paid in 1998 — but the state pays \$3.8 billion a year to reimburse cities and counties for revenues lost by the reduction. Now, Davis is proposing to increase the rate back to the level it was in 1999. The car tax is based on the value of the vehicle.

Davis, who is seeking a second term in November, was under intense pressure to craft a politically acceptable and realistic plan that will pass muster with lawmakers, the agencies that rate the state's cred-

it and voters.

On education, Davis proposed to cut \$1.12 billion in spending in the current fiscal year. But his plan calls for the reductions to be repaid next fiscal year.

David also avoided suspending the requirements of Proposition 98 "by a very creative and badly needed approach that shifts school funding between fiscal years," said Kevin Gordon, executive director of the California Association of School Business Officials.

Davis outlined the plan Tuesday after months of speculation how he would plug an estimated budget hole that ballooned from \$12.5 billion in January to one-third of the state's general fund.

The new plan is based largely on California's April tax receipts — thought to be the most accurate reading of the state's fiscal health — which fell far below forecasts.

This year's plan is a drastic departure from the budget surpluses, tax cuts and generous spending of Davis' first two years in office. The state began to see anemic revenues more than a year ago in the midst of a national slump, tumult in the high-tech industry and a statewide electricity crisis.

The picture steadily worsened as tourism and travel dropped off and security costs jumped after Sept. 11.

Davis' plan also would borrow \$4.5 billion using as collateral money the state expects to collect in the future from a 1998 settlement with tobacco companies.

Davis pledged for months that he didn't intend to raise taxes to fill the budget hole. But Democratic lawmakers contended it would be impossible to solve a multi-billion problem without tax hikes.

Counseling options limited for local college students

FUNDING, from page 1

to reduce its annual appointments with students by 11,000.

"It's devastating, it's absolutely devastating for counseling," she said. "We are going to have to drastically reduce our service to students."

"They need the moral support, the emotional support," she added. "It's those types of services that are hard to quantify but it's those that we will be losing."

Many SMC students currently have to wait in long lines and schedule appointments with counselors up to a week in advance. And that's with the counseling center open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., five days a week.

The state legislature sets student fees and tuition at community colleges throughout California. SMC officials said tuition increases are unlikely.

"It could present a serious cash flow problem for many community colleges — paying their staff and continuing to provide the services staff and students are accustomed to," said Scott Lay, an analyst with the California Association of Community Colleges.

"Students are going to find longer lines and fewer class sections," he said. "Things are going to be a lot tighter on community college campuses for the next few years."

Like public school districts, community colleges are funded based on how many students it has.

SMC officials estimate a 1.3 percent decrease in funding per student. The statewide average is about \$4,684 a year per student. SMC officials said the college receives far less than the average, but they couldn't provide exact figures or why it receives less than other schools.

Johnson said counseling at SMC will likely become more broad-based, focusing less on individual counseling sessions with students having a hard time adjusting to college life.

~~Lay is concerned student services cuts may impact CalWorks, the state's welfare to work program, which would leave many poor students shut out of services they need.~~

~~"We will work with the state and local community college get through this tough fiscal year and make sure many of those programs remain in place," he said.~~

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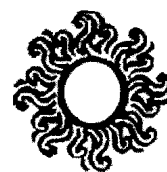
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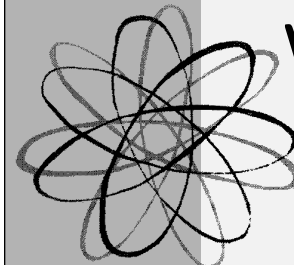
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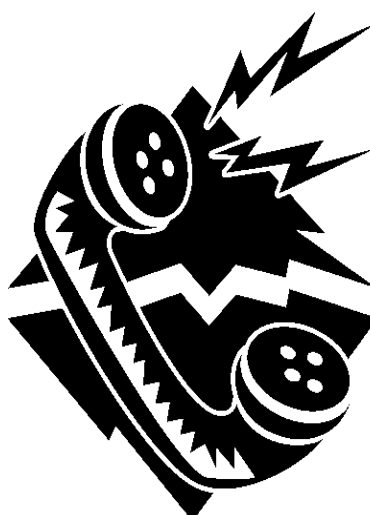
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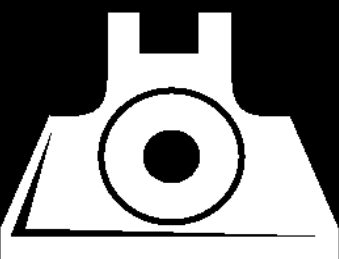
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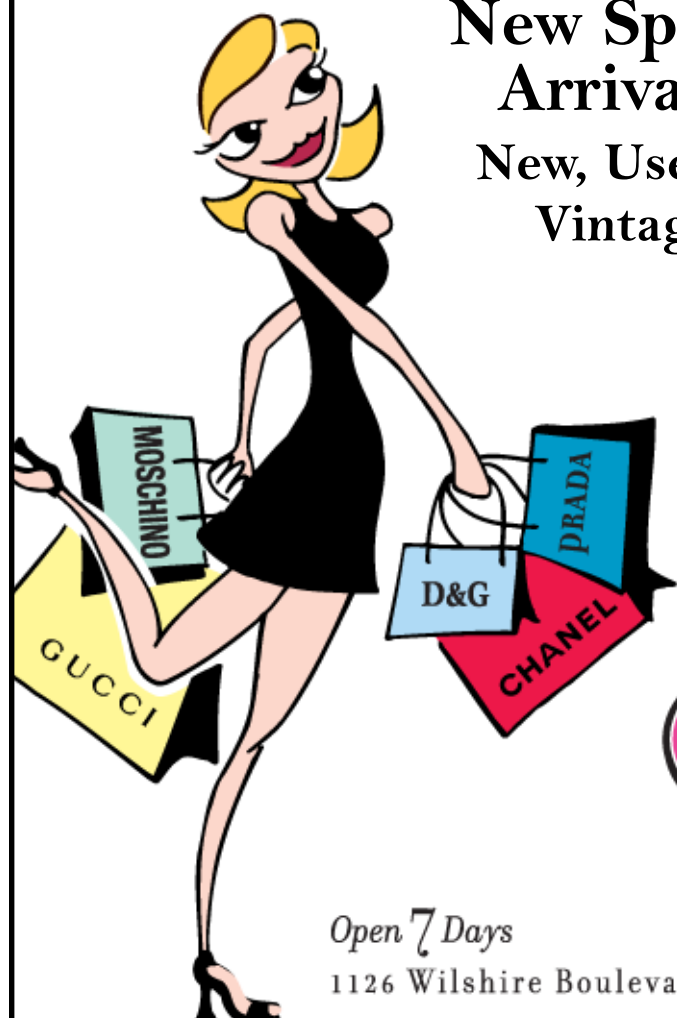
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STATE

High rents tightens grip of poverty in California

BY JUSTIN PRITCHARD

Associated Press Writer

STOCKTON. — California's poverty rate rose during the 1990s, even as the state's economy crested and many residents found themselves flush with disposable income.

What's more, because the boom drove up the cost of living, Californians in impoverished areas tended to sink more of their income into housing than in places with eye-popping prices such as San Francisco or Los Angeles County's swank beach towns.

Those facts emerge from new Census 2000 numbers released Tuesday that offer a nuanced look at everything from Californians' education levels to commute times to how much residents earn.

According to the data, one in seven Californians, or 14.2 percent of the population, lived in poverty in 2000 — up from one in eight, or 12.5 percent, a decade earlier.

The new data do not specify how many of the poorest also pay more than 30 percent of their income in rent, the threshold above which rents are considered a disproportionate burden. But the trend is clear across the state.

In counties with relatively high poverty rates, many in "the other California" east of the coastal cities, residents tend to spend above that rent ceiling more often than residents of high-cost areas. With the landlord taking more, the poor have less to spend on health care, education or pleasure.

Such stories are familiar to Stockton,

a Central Valley city of 244,000 about 70 miles due east of the San Francisco Bay area.

Federal figures peg the county unemployment rate at 10 percent. Now, the Census Bureau is reporting that nearly 24 percent of people in Stockton lived in poverty in 2000, up from about 21 percent in 1990.

"Even in the '90s, when we had this incredible economic expansion, the numbers are going the wrong way," says Carol Whiteside, president of the nonprofit Great Valley Center and former mayor of Modesto. "It's a huge issue for the state."

Stockton's leaders pitch their city as a low-cost alternative for refugees of the Bay Area's high housing. At around \$750 per month, the rent for a three-bedroom apartment may draw chuckles from residents of the Silicon Valley and San Francisco.

But those refugees have driven up housing prices in recent years, and many of Stockton's poor find the rent gobbling up much of their income.

Almost half of the city's residents paid more than 30 percent of their income in rent, the data show. By contrast, 36 percent of San Franciscans paid above that threshold — the rate was 39 percent in the L.A. beach town of Marina del Rey and 42 percent in San Jose, the same as the statewide rate.

Because rents never fall too low, the poor pay a greater portion of their income in rent than others. But the latest census numbers seem skewed against the poor, even with rents in coastal metro areas that can average \$1,800 for a one-bedroom apartment.

A look at the state's towns

By The Associated Press

The latest Census Bureau data gives a more nuanced look at everything from housing to education to commute times, reflecting answers on the 2000 Census "long form," which was completed by roughly 1 in 6 households. Here's a look at California communities with at least 5,000 residents:

- Highest average household income: Atherton, \$274,000
- Lowest: Isla Vista, \$23,800
- California average: \$64,700
- Californians driving to work alone: 72 percent
- Place where most drive to work alone: Rosedale, 88 percent
- Place where most carpooled to work: Mendota, 54 percent
- Statewide average, 15 percent
- Place where most took public transportation to work: San Francisco, 31 percent
- Statewide average, 5 percent
- Place where most walked to work: Marine Corps Base, Twentynine Palms, 48 percent
- Statewide average, 3 percent
- Place where most worked at home: Mill Valley, 15 percent
- Statewide average, 4 percent
- Greatest percentage of self-employed: Mill Valley, 23 percent
- Statewide average, 9 percent
- Residents with the longest commute: Lake Los Angeles, 54 minutes
- Statewide average, 28 minutes
- Greatest percentage of residents 25 or older with a college degree: Los Altos Hills, 78 percent
- Statewide average, 27 percent
- Residents 25 or older with less than a 9th

grade education: Huron, 62 percent

statewide average, 12 percent

- Highest percentage of foreign born residents: Mecca 60 percent

California average, 26 percent

- Smallest percentage of foreign born residents: Susanville, 1 percent

- Greatest percentage of unmarried people: Isla Vista, 74 percent

Statewide average, 30 percent.

- Greatest percentage of married people: Avenal, 78 percent

Statewide average, 52 percent.

- Greatest percentage of divorced residents: Marina del Rey, 21 percent

Statewide average, 10 percent.

- Greatest percentage over age 5 speaking only English: Grass Valley, 96 percent

Statewide English-only average, 61 percent

- Greatest percentage over 5 speaking language other than English: Calexico, 94 percent.

- Homes with highest median number of rooms: Hillsborough, 8.4 rooms

Statewide average, 4.8 rooms

- Homes with lowest median number of rooms: Huntington Park, 2.9 rooms

- Homes without complete plumbing: Parlier, 3 percent

Statewide average, 1 percent

- Homes without kitchens: Firebaugh, 4 percent

Statewide average, 1 percent

- Homes without phones: Shackleford, 12 percent

Statewide average, 2 percent

- Homes above \$1 million: Atherton, 89 percent

Statewide average, 2 percent.

- Homes under \$50,000: Twentynine Palms, 21 percent

Statewide average, 2 percent.

NATIONAL



Derailed



Stephen Morton/Associated Press

An Amtrak train sits derailed on Tuesday after colliding with a log truck near Coosawhatchie, S.C. No fatalities were reported but two people were reported seriously injured. The remains of the logs and the trailer were wrapped around the front of the train. The train was carrying 120 passengers and 13 crew from New York to Miami when it derailed.

Eggs served up on highway

By The Associated Press

CROWN POINT, Ind. — Breakfast was served up on an Indiana highway after a truck driver fell asleep at the wheel and smashed into a guard rail.

The crash caused about 270,000 eggs from the truck to spill on Interstate 65. The cracked, raw eggs were spread about a quarter of a mile down the road.

Northbound lanes were blocked for almost four hours.

Indiana State Police said the driver, Michael A. Haynes, 41, of Chicago, was cited for unsafe lane movement and for not having a log book.

No one was injured.

Bee prank has school buzzing

By The Associated Press

DELAND, Fla. — DeLand High School was buzzing with activity earlier this week, but it had nothing to do with excitement about the soon-to-end school year.

A principal says students released 80,000 bees on campus in an apparent prank on Monday. Students were sent home early after eight beehives were glued down on school grounds and the swarms escaped, said principal Mitch Moyer. No one was stung, he said.

"We've contended with various senior pranks over the years, but this one could have been dangerous," said Moyer, who is allergic to bee stings.

The Volusia County Sheriff's office was investigating the incident.

If the pranksters are students, they could be barred from the school's graduation ceremony, officials said.

"It's the best prank ever. It canceled school," said Emary Frederick, 18, who along with 530 seniors finishes high school Thursday.

The beehives were marked as property of Horace Bell Honey, a 40-year-old DeLand-based wholesale apiary. Beekeeper Luella Bell estimates her business will lose \$800 due to the prank.

She said the stolen hives contained younger bees, which are not as likely to sting as older, more aggressive bees.

Store tries to laugh off lawsuit

By The Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — A grocery store chain, accused of ripping off a competitor's advertisements, tried to laugh off a lawsuit by repeating a decade-old publicity stunt.

Rainbow Foods on Monday suggested a wrestling match between one of its executives and a leader of rival Cub Foods, which filed a lawsuit against Rainbow last week.

Cub, a unit of Eden Prairie-based SuperValu Inc., accused Rainbow, a unit of Fleming Cos., of stealing Cub's newspaper inserts prior to publication and

using them to undercut its prices.

Rainbow has several weeks to file a legal response to the lawsuit. Executives asked a Minneapolis public relations firm to craft a response in the meantime. They came up with the wrestling idea, complete with a "Rainbow Rumble" logo.

The match gained enormous publicity for both companies and has been mentioned in several books since.

Cub rejected Rainbow's wrestling proposal, saying it "trivializes what we believe are legitimate and serious allegations, which will be appropriately addressed in a court of law, not in the wrestling ring."

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NATIONAL

Consumer spending jumps in April, report reveals

BY JEANNINE AVERSA

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Consumers — the economy's lifeblood — are keeping the recovery on track. They shopped with more gusto in April, pushing retail sales up by 1.2 percent, the best performance in six months.

The latest sales snapshot released by the Commerce Department Tuesday raised hopes among economists that shoppers will continue to keep their pocketbooks and wallets open to support the fledgling recovery in the months ahead.

"Consumers, for the most part, lack neither confidence nor money, and as long as they maintain even moderate growth in spending, the economy will keep chugging along," said Bill Cheney, chief economist at John Hancock.

The 1.2 percent advance was the biggest gain since a record 6.2 percent in October and was double what most economists were expecting. The stronger-than-expected performance came after a tightfisted March, when retail sales inched up by 0.1 percent.

On Wall Street, stocks soared on the good retail sales news. The Dow Jones industrial average gained 189.24 points to close at 10,298.90.

Consumers, whose spending accounts for two-thirds of all economic activity in the United States, bought more cars, building materials, garden supplies and health care and beauty products last month. They ate out more, too.

Higher prices at the gasoline pump also contributed to the increase in overall retail sales in April. Even excluding sales at gasoline stations, though, retail sales were still solid.

The strong showing last month came despite a jump in the unemployment rate to an eight-year high of 6 percent.

Tuesday's report showed that car sales went up 1.9 percent in April, following a 0.8 percent decline in March. Sales of building materials and garden supplies rose 2.7 percent, on top of a 1.7 percent gain.

At health and beauty stores, sales rose 1.9 percent, a turnaround from the 0.5 percent drop in March. Sales at clothing stores rose 0.7 percent, compared with a 0.3 percent dip. At department stores,

sales increased 1.2 percent, after edging up 0.1 percent.

Sales at gasoline stations rose 2 percent, following a 4 percent increase. Increases in recent months reflect higher prices at the pump.

At bars and restaurants, sales rose 0.6 percent, after being flat. Sales of electronics and appliances nudged up 0.1 percent, after holding steady in March.

There were some weak spots. Sales of furniture and home furnishings dropped by 1.4 percent, following a 0.1 percent decline the previous month. Sporting goods stores saw sales dip 0.1 percent, after a 0.6 percent increase.

Concern about how consumers, who kept spending during the recession, will hold up during the recovery was a factor in the Federal Reserve's decision May 7 to keep short-term interest rates — now at 40-year lows — unchanged.

Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan and his colleagues have held rates steady at all three of their meetings this year. Many analysts say the central bank will not begin to push rates higher until fall, after unemployment peaks and begins to decline.

The nation's jobless rate could move as high as 6.5 percent by June if companies are slow to hire and job growth isn't strong enough to handle an expected influx of jobseekers, economists said.

Economists worry that rising unemployment might make consumers scale back. Low interest rates, however, might persuade them to keep on buying and help along the economic recovery.

"If you listen to Alan Greenspan, the economic rebound is quite fragile. If you look at consumer actions, it is not," said Joel Naroff of Naroff Economic Advisors.

Last week, the nation's largest retailers, including Wal-Mart and Target, said April's sales were dampened by cool weather and an earlier Easter, which fell in March this year.

Tuesday's report painted a brighter picture than that provided by the biggest retailers in part because the government report is broader and includes car sales and sales at gasoline stations — both of which showed strength in April, said Richard Yamarone, economist with Argus Research Corp.

Bush signs immigration bill enhancing border security

BY SCOTT LINDLAW

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — President Bush signed an immigration bill Tuesday meant to screen out terrorists by using high-tech passports and more border enforcers to check millions of people who enter the United States each year.

The new law also will mean closer monitoring of foreign students here.

"America is not a fortress and we never want to be a fortress," Bush said at a signing ceremony. "But on the other hand, we can do a better job of making our borders more secure and make our borders smart."

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., called the measure "the most important bill passed post-9/11."

"It's the first time security has really become part of immigration policy," she said.

The new law will require that passports issued after 2003 contain fingerprints or facial recognition technology and be tamperproof. It will bar the use of certain visas

by people from countries listed as terrorism sponsors.

The State Department's list includes Iraq, North Korea, Iran, Sudan, Cuba, Libya and Syria.

The law strengthens requirements that planes and passenger ships traveling from other countries provide lists of passengers and crew members to a U.S. border officer before arriving, and reiterates the need for a database of suspected terrorists that federal agencies can use to screen visa applicants. Such a list already exists under the Federal Terrorism Tracking Task Force that Bush created after Sept. 11.

Several of the Sept. 11 hijackers were in the country on student visas, and the new law creates an elaborate tracking system of foreign students.

It will record the acceptance of noncitizens by educational institutions, the issuance of student visas and the enrollment of non-Americans in schools. It also will force schools to tell government officials if foreign students do not report for class.

The law authorizes 400 additional immigration

investigators, inspectors and other staff for the Immigration and Naturalization Service, subject to Congress financing them.

Bush complained that the bill did not include a provision he sought — a measure to grant amnesty to illegal immigrants, so they could apply for residency without leaving the United States. That provision was an important component of Bush's outreach to Hispanic voters.

"I intend to work with Congress to see if we can't get that done here pretty quick," Bush said.

According to the president, immigration authorities process 500 million people a year, half of them returning Americans. Customs officials screen 11 million trucks and 51,000 foreign ships, he said.

"It reminds us that no nation can be totally secure or more secure unless we're well protected, and unless our borders are well screened," Bush said. "We must know who's coming into our country and why they're coming. We must know what our visitors are doing, and when they leave."

MADISON THEATER PROJECT NOTICE OF PREPARATION

Santa Monica Community College District (SMCCD) is preparing an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Madison Theater Project. The project, located at SMCCD's Madison Campus at 1310 11th Street in the City of Santa Monica, will consist of a new 536-seat performance theater and includes converting the existing unused school auditorium into a classroom rehearsal hall. SMC intends to use the Madison Theater as an academic lecture hall Mon. through Thurs. mornings and Mon., Tues., and Wed. evenings, and as a performance theater providing cultural and performing arts programming on a seasonal basis on Thurs. and Fri. evenings and weekends. The following environmental issues will be addressed in the EIR: Land Use, Neighborhood Effects, Traffic, Parking, Air Quality, Noise, Public Services, Utilities, Historic Resources, and Aesthetics (Views, Light/Glare, Shade/Shadows). The public is encouraged to provide written comments to the SMCCD with respect to potential environmental impacts that may occur as a result of this project. Please address all comments to Mr. Thomas Donner, Executive Vice President, Business & Administration at 1900 Pico Blvd., Santa Monica, CA, 90405. Written comments are due no later than June 14, 2002. A public scoping meeting will be held to present the project and solicit public comments with regard to potential environmental impacts. The meeting will be held at the Madison Campus Cafeteria, at 1310 11th Street, Santa Monica, on Sat. May 18, 2002, at 1:00 p.m.

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INTERNATIONAL



Israeli forces kill two Palestinian intelligence officers

BY RAVI NESSMAN
Associated Press Writer

JERUSALEM — Israeli forces raided four West Bank villages Tuesday, killing two Palestinian intelligence officers and arresting 15 suspected militants, and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon ruled out peace talks until attacks against Israel end.

Speaking to Israel's Knesset, Sharon said the raids aimed at rooting out Palestinian militants would continue, even though Israel's large-scale incursion into the West Bank has ended.

"We will continue to fight terrorism by entering (Palestinian-controlled areas) when necessary," Sharon said. "There will be no sanctuary for terrorists."

Sharon was called to address Israel's Knesset after 40 lawmakers signed a petition demanding that he explain his policies regarding a future Palestinian state.

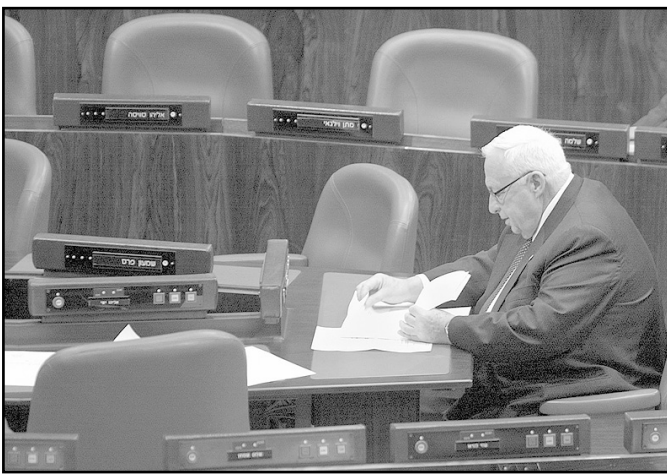
Sharon did not mention the issue of a Palestinian state in his speech, though his own Likud party, ignoring his advice, passed a resolution early Monday ruling out creation of such a state.

Instead, Sharon reiterated his refusal to restart peace talks until terror attacks end and the Palestinian leadership carries out fundamental reforms.

"There can be no peace with a corrupt terror regime that is rotten and dictatorial," the prime minister said in reference to the Palestinian Authority, headed by Yasser Arafat. "There must be a different authority."

Only then could the two sides work out an accord for a "long-term interim period," that could eventually be followed by a final peace agreement, he said.

The Palestinians have rejected Sharon's proposals, saying they will enter peace talks only if they are focused on a final settlement and creation of a Palestinian state.



Enric Marti/Associated Press

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon checks his notes before addressing the Knesset, Israel's parliament, in Jerusalem on Tuesday. Sharon said he will not resume peace talks with the Palestinians until terror attacks end and the Palestinian leadership carries out reforms.

Palestinian Cabinet minister Nabil Shaath said Sharon should not put conditions on the Palestinians.

"This is a new attempt to freeze the efforts that have been exerted to revive the peace process," Shaath said.

After 19 months of Mideast fighting and increasing hardships, Palestinians have grown critical of Arafat and the Palestinian leadership. However, Arafat's position still appears solid for now, and Palestinians say they alone will choose their leaders.

Sharon had opposed the Likud resolution against a Palestinian state, saying it would tie his hands in negotiations and embarrass his government abroad. Despite

losing that battle, Sharon's wider popularity with Israelis did not appear to suffer.

In a poll taken after the Likud decision and released Tuesday, 63 percent of Israelis said they would support the creation of a Palestinian state accompanied by a peace agreement. The Dahaf Institute poll, which surveyed 501 Israelis and had a margin of error of 4.5 percent, found 55 percent wanted Sharon as Likud's prime ministerial candidate for next year's elections.

Meanwhile, Israel's army pressed ahead with West Bank raids.

The Israeli forces said they killed two Palestinian intelligence officials in the village of Halhoul, north of Hebron.

The head of Palestinian intelligence in the area, Khalid Abu Kheiran, was killed, along with one of his deputies. According to Israel, both men were responsible for many attacks against Israelis.

The army said they were killed in an exchange of fire. Witnesses said the men were in a car pulling into a driveway when shooting broke out. A third man was arrested and a fourth fled, witnesses said.

The car, its windshield riddled with bullets, remained parked next to the house witnesses said the men had been using as a hiding place for several months.

Later, at Abu Kheiran's funeral, Palestinian youths threw stones at Israeli troops, who fired into the air. No injuries were reported.

The army also said it arrested 14 Palestinian suspects in three raids on West Bank villages near the towns of Tulkarem and Nablus.

In Gaza, Israeli soldiers arrested an activist from the militant Hamas group after nightfall Tuesday, the military said. Soldiers stopped the truck he was driving and found two pipe bombs inside, a statement said.

A couple's strange detour to alleged Sept. 11 connections

BY JASBANT SINGH
By The Associated Press

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia — They could once have been a shining example of Malaysia as a modern, moderate Muslim country. A yearning by Yazid Sufaat and his wife to be more devout Muslims became a detour into extremism and prison on accusations of links to the Sept. 11 hijackers.

The couple, who met in the mid-1980s as students in the United States, are among 62 people arrested in Malaysia over the past year for alleged involvement in Islamic militant groups.

The crackdown has led to wide praise for Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, who met President Bush in Washington on Tuesday to receive American thanks for his role in the war on terror.

Most of the allegations relate to a grand scheme to transform Malaysia, Indonesia and the predominantly Muslim southern Philippines into a single fundamentalist state.

The claims against Yazid point to deeper

involvement in the region by the radical Jemaah Islamiyah movement — a plot to blow up the U.S. Embassy in neighboring Singapore and a connection, if marginal and possibly unwitting, to the Sept. 11 attacks.

Yazid is accused of offering his apartment outside Kuala Lumpur as a meeting place two years ago for two future Sept. 11 hijackers — Saudi nationals Khalid Almihdhar and Nawaf Alhazmi. The men commandeered the jetliner that crashed into the Pentagon.

Yazid's wife, Sejahratul Dursina, helped provide a letter of employment that enabled Zacarias Moussaoui to enter the United States, police say. Moussaoui is on trial in U.S. District Court in Virginia for conspiracy in the Sept. 11 attacks. He faces the death penalty if convicted.

Sejahratul, called Chomel by friends and family, was arrested April 18 and is the only woman among the detainees.

It appears unlikely that either will play a role in Moussaoui's trial. Jury selection is set for September. Senior U.S. officials

say they have not questioned Yazid, nor sought his extradition.

The couple deny the accusations. They and the other suspects are being detained without trial under Malaysia's national security law.

The guide on their journey from Malaysia's middle class to the fringes of extremism was a soft-spoken Islamic teacher named Riduan Isamuddin, better known as Hambali.

Officials say Hambali, an Indonesian, had deep connections with al-Qaida and was in charge of recruiting militants for Jemaah Islamiyah.

In their youth, the couple were emblematic of Mahathir's long campaign to build a modern country. Each was a top student and won government scholarships to California State University at Sacramento, where they met in 1983. They spoke good English, wore jeans and shorts and made American friends.

Yazid, who had attended Malaysia's military college since he was 15, studied

microbiology. Sejahratul pursued civil engineering. They married in Sacramento a year after meeting.

In the early 1990s, they went into business for themselves, founding Infocus Tech, a small firm dealing in computers.

Their lifestyle changed after Sejahratul's mother encouraged them to attend classes on Islam in 1994.

The lessons had a powerful impact.

The couple attended up to five classes a week. Their three children were sent to private Islamic schools instead of state-funded secular institutions. Sejahratul began wearing ankle-length robes and Islamic headscarves.

"They were not biased against Americans," Suri Hanim said. "They always spoke fondly of their stay in the U.S."

Yazid was arrested Dec. 9 as he returned to Malaysia from a trip to Pakistan, where he claimed he was studying pathology, and Afghanistan, where he planned to do medical support work.

Hambali's whereabouts are unknown.

\$11 billion Crusader is big target for Rumsfeld's Pentagon

BY MATT KELLEY
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — The Crusader was designed to be the world's dominant artillery piece, a high-tech cannon able to rain shells on enemy forces more than 25 miles away.

The Pentagon wants to eliminate the \$11 billion program, in part because the 40-ton Crusader would be difficult to deliver to remote battlefields. So far, \$2 billion has been spent.

Originally planned to enter service in 2008, the Crusader itself is basically a big gun — looking like a tank with a 17-foot, nine-inch barrel. It fires 155 mm shells, using a computerized targeting system to enhance accuracy.

A prototype has fired 10 rounds a minute — one every six seconds.

The military is working to develop a satellite-guided artillery shell. Officials say that work probably will continue despite plans to cancel Crusader.

The Crusader's crew of three soldiers does not have to

load the ammunition into the gun. They work on computer screens in a crew compartment that the Crusader's builders compare to a fighter jet cockpit.

Using the same engine and drive train as an M-1 Abrams tank, the Crusader is designed to travel at between 25 and 40 mph.

At 40 tons, the Crusader is large and harder to transport. Only the Air Force's largest transport planes — the C-5 and C-17 — could carry one. Those planes need longer and better runways to land, making the Crusader more difficult to quickly put in remote areas.

Another concern is that Crusader isn't accurate enough to hit small pockets of enemy fighters, such as U.S. troops have faced in Afghanistan.

Its backers dispute that idea. In March, before Crusader's cancellation, Army Secretary Thomas White told a Senate panel that Crusader would have eliminated the threat of mortars and shells fired at U.S. troops by Taliban and al-Qaida fighters.

Now it's at the center of a battle that pits President Bush

and his defense secretary, Donald H. Rumsfeld, against Congress over whether to preserve the weapon system.

Rumsfeld announced Wednesday that he was killing the Crusader system, saying the \$9 billion planned for bringing the howitzer to the battlefield could be better spent on other high-tech weapons to protect U.S. ground troops. Resistance to the idea by Army officials put another cloud over White until White fell in behind Rumsfeld's decision.

Congress, on the other hand, wasn't so pliant. The House early Friday passed a 2003 defense authorization that earmarked \$475 million for further development of the Crusader.

An investment firm chaired by Frank Carlucci, a defense secretary in the Reagan administration, owns the contractor that is to build the Crusader. The Carlyle Group investment firm's senior counsel is James Baker, secretary of state in the first Bush administration and treasury secretary and White House chief of staff during the Reagan era.

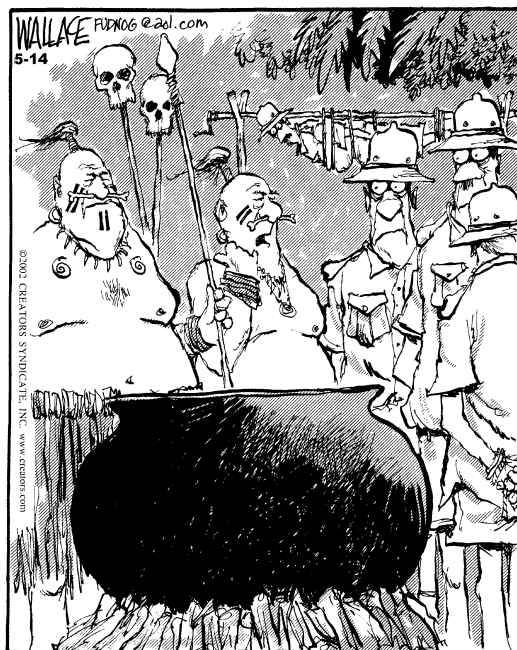


COMICS

The Dinette Set by Julie Larson



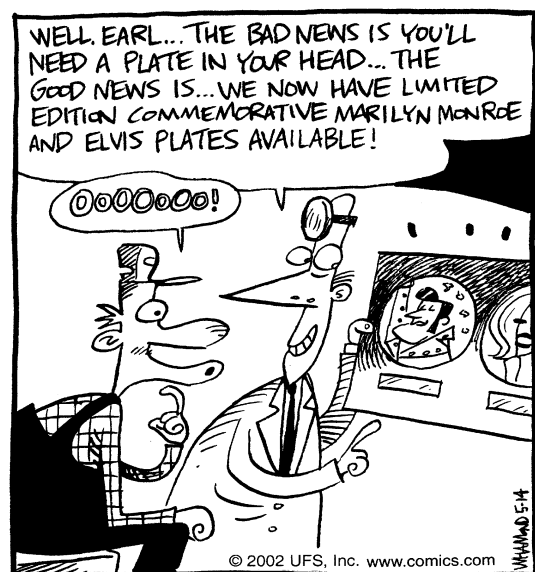
Natural Selection® By Russ Wallace



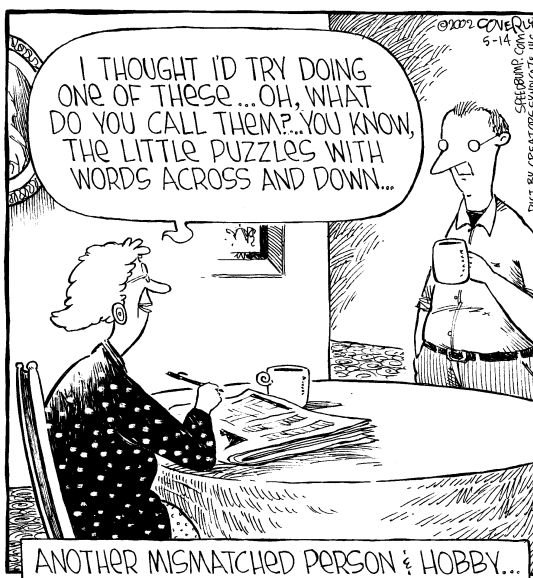
edge city by TERRY & PATTY LABAN



Reality Check® By Dave Whammond



Speed Bump® By Dave Coverly



CROSSWORD By THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 "Meet John Doe" director
 - 6 Hackneyed
 - 11 Fixed a squeak
 - 12 Track events
 - 13 Trip planner
 - 15 High rating
 - 16 Snapshot
 - 17 Follower of HST
 - 18 Unrelated son, e.g.
 - 20 Golf aid
 - 21 Archaic
 - 22 Time in office
 - 23 Model Crawford
 - 26 Pentagon bigwigs
 - 27 Angers
 - 28 Eastern "way"
 - 29 Pinnacle
 - 30 Loose-leaf holders
 - 34 Picnic pest
 - 35 Common conjunction
 - 36 By way of
 - 37 Mole
 - 40 Bert's friend
 - 41 Hospital employee
 - 42 Yorkshire town
- DOWN**
- 43 Starts a poker hand
 - 1 Terra —
 - 2 Broadcast
 - 3 Texas city
 - 4 Abbr. before a minister's name
 - 5 With skill
 - 6 Follow the outline of
 - 7 Cloth tatter
 - 8 Summer drink
 - 9 Offers
 - 10 Reveres
 - 14 Told whoppers
 - 19 Pea holders
 - 22 Trampled
 - 23 Strong-hold
 - 24 Magnetite, for one
 - 25 God of the sea
 - 26 Kerchief
 - 28 Fork part
 - 30 Cotton bundles
 - 31 Turn aside
 - 32 Washer cycle
 - 33 Fills
 - 38 Auction
 - 39 Shooting range

A	L	A	M	O		G	A	P	S	
D	A	R	I	N		E	P	E	E	S
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A	V	I	D		B	O	O			
D	A	D	O	O	R	O	N	R	O	N
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O	L	I	V	E		D	E	G	A	S
Y	E	M	E	N		I	N	E	R	T
D	E	E	D		E	S	S	A	Y	

Yesterday's answer

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42						43			

5-14

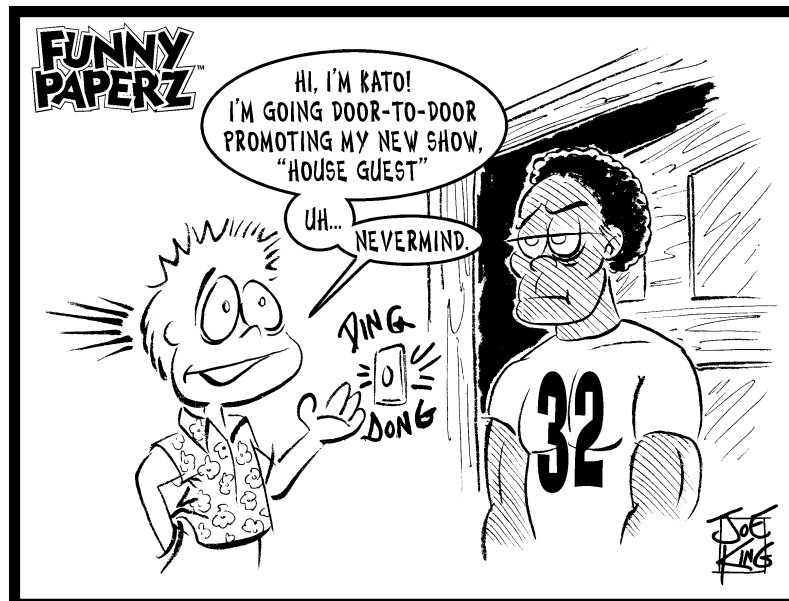
STUMPED?

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NEWS OF THE WEIRD by Chuck Shepard

Police smell a skunk, nab suspect

- A 32-year-old man, fleeing into the woods on foot after a police traffic stop, was quickly captured after being incapacitated by a skunk's spray (Lewiston, Maine).
- Police shut down what an officer called a "full-service (drive-through) drug window" at an apartment house (Syracuse, N.Y.).
- The Sioux City, Iowa, city council made yet another official request to the Federal Aviation Administration to change its airport designation, which is SUX.



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BACK PAGE

Booting illegally parked cars catching on in cities

BY DON BABWIN
Associated Press Writer

CHICAGO — Signs warned Brad Kellner not to park in the lot behind The Bagel restaurant unless he was a customer. He did it anyway, and he ended up getting the boot.

When it became clear Kellner wasn't patronizing the store, Mark Ifill, hired by the restaurant to enforce the "customer-only" parking policy, slapped a metal wheel clamp known as a boot on his Audi, preventing it from moving. It cost Kellner \$100 to get it removed.

"We needed to do something," said Michael Golenzer, an owner of The Bagel. "It was getting out of hand."

The Bagel is one of a small but growing number of businesses in Chicago whose owners are fed up with people who park in their lots but spend their money elsewhere.

Following the lead of local governments around the country that immobilize vehicles for unpaid parking tickets, merchants have turned to private companies to make sure only those who patronize their businesses park in their lots.

The companies have set up shop in other cities like New York and Denver, and there are plans to expand to

Atlanta and elsewhere. In Chicago, an enterprise that was first allowed in only four of the city's 50 wards was expanded to a fifth this month.

Merchants say much of their business depends on the customers who use their lots, and they can't afford to have their limited space taken up by vehicles whose owners don't shop with them.

Towing companies also can be used to deal with offenders, but merchants say they are too slow unless people park long enough to take in a movie or catch a Cubs game.

"You could always play a cat-and-mouse game with tow trucks," said John Borovicka, an assistant to Alderman Bernard Hansen, whose ward allows booting. "If you didn't see a tow truck, you knew you could be back before one got there, and if you saw one, you knew he was busy."

But not everybody thinks booting is a good idea.

"It is the most anti-business, onerous thing that we have in Denver," said Ed Thomas, a Denver city councilman who tried unsuccessfully to ban private booting companies there.

"You boot 50 people a day," he said, and that angers 50 people a day. "Do you think they're going to go back there? Do you think the 10 friends they tell are going to go back there?"

But business owners say booting does not drive away customers — it makes more room for them. "My customers know they have a place to park," said Golenzer, the bagel store owner.

Still, there is concern about the potential for violence.

"There's a reason why when you get your car from a towing company, they're behind bulletproof glass and you feed your money through a window," said Dave Weigand, the chief of police for the Illinois Commerce Commission, which regulates the towing of vehicles illegally parked on private property. "People are angry."

And with booting companies, that anger is not directed at someone safely in a booth at the impound yard, but at that guy who has just put his boot on your BMW.

Ifill, in charge of patrolling The Bagel lot, doesn't think increased booting will lead to more violence, at least not in Chicago.

"These are some of the nicest people I've ever booted," he said.

Medical pot users claim government growing 'weak' weed

By The Associated Press

SAN JOSE — In the world of high-grade marijuana, sticks, seeds and stems are not welcome ingredients. So when medical marijuana researchers claimed to have found such cannabis chafe among the pot imported from a government farm, they came to a sour conclusion.

These are not kind buds for medical marijuana patients.

The government-grown marijuana is being provided to San Mateo County for

the first publicly funded analysis of HIV patients smoking the drug at home. But some of the patients and medical marijuana advocacy groups say the Mississippi-grown weed is weak.

"It's unconscionable that they would be giving this marijuana to patients," said Dale Gieringer, state coordinator for NORML, the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws. "It's stale, low-potency ditch weed."

There are fewer than 10 people taking part in the study originally planned for 60

participants. One man gave up smoking the government-grade joints altogether after he became fed up with the low quality.

"I couldn't smoke the stuff any more," said Phillip Alden, a freelance writer who depends on medical marijuana to ease his HIV-related ailments. "I was disgusted with the federal government."

The government defends its marijuana, however.

"The marijuana we provide does not contain sticks and seeds. The problem is re-humidifying. It makes it kind of harsh," said

Steve Gust, special assistant to the director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

They're having just the opposite problem in La Jolla, where two patients enrolled in a medical marijuana trial program have complained that the NIDA-provided pot is too potent.

"They've reported getting high shortly after the first few puffs," said Dr. Andrew Mattison, the center's co-director. "These are people with a chronic, debilitating illness who do not want to get high. They want to get pain relief."

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