

Santa Monica Daily Press

A newspaper with issues

DAILY LOTTERY

FANTASY 5

2 3 7 25 28

DAILY 3

Daytime: 8 2 3

Evening: 9 7 0

DAILY DERBY

1st: 07 Eureka

2nd: 10 Solid Gold

3rd: 11 Money Bags

RACE TIME: 1:47.93



NEWS OF THE WEIRD BY CHUCK SHEPARD

Featured at the Donn Roll Contemporary Museum in Sarasota, Fla., in 1996 was Ms. Charon Luebbers' Menstrual Hut, a 6-by-6-by-5-foot isolation booth to symbolize the loneliness that society has forced upon menstruating women. Accompanying it were 28 canvasses created by Luebbers' pressing her face into whatever discharge was present in each of the 28 days of her cycle for one month, to show the contrast....

TODAY IN HISTORY

On Aug. 20, 1968, the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact nations began invading Czechoslovakia to crush the "Prague Spring" liberalization drive of Alexander Dubcek's regime.

■ In 1833, Benjamin Harrison, the 23rd president of the United States, was born in North Bend, Ohio.

■ In 1866, President Andrew Johnson formally declared the Civil War over, months after the fighting had stopped.

■ In 1914, German forces occupied Brussels, Belgium, during World War I.

■ In 1918, Britain opened its offensive on the Western front during World War I.

THOUGHT OF THE DAY

"I am more and more convinced that man is a dangerous creature; and that power, whether vested in many or a few, is ever grasping, and like the grave, cries 'Give, give!'"

ABIGAIL ADAMS
AMERICAN WRITER (1744-1818)

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What lies beneath



Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press
A lifeguard on Thursday watches over swimmers in the fitness pool at the Santa Monica Swim Center.

Farmers' Market crash civil cases back in courtroom

Millions of dollars are at stake as cases move forward; 914-page police report to stay sealed

BY JOHN WOOD

Daily Press Staff Writer

SM COURTHOUSE — Two weeks after an appellate court stepped in to shake things up, the race resumed Thursday for millions of dollars in lawsuits rising out of the Farmers' Market crash last summer.

A total of 15 attorneys packed into Santa Monica Superior Court Judge Valerie Baker's courtroom for a morning hearing on a slate of legal fine points expected to be raised at trial. One lawyer represented City Hall, another was there for elderly driver Russell Weller, and a third stood in for the non-

profit organization that runs downtown. The other 12 lawyers represented victims of the fatal accident.

Nearly 30 civil lawsuits have been filed in the aftermath of the July 16, 2003 crash, which left 10 people dead and more than 60 injured. Lawyers have targeted Santa Monica City Hall and the Bayside District Corp., among other outside parties, as Weller's assets are expected to exhaust quickly. Lawyers said two or more additional lawsuits might be filed before the statute of limitations runs out on Sept. 2.

Weller, now 87, a retired grocer

See FARMERS' MARKET, page 5

Stuck in the Web: City site slows surfers

BY JOHN F. MULLER

Special to the Daily Press

CITY HALL — Although officials here say a \$45,000 makeover of the city's Web site has made it more navigable and pleasing to the eye, some users say the result is a slower and more cumbersome version of its predecessor.

Under the leadership of Keith Kurtz, the city's Internet system's

coordinator, the site was redesigned earlier this year with the help of the local firm Vision Internet. Launched June 1, santa-monica.org includes about 25,000 pages. The site generates about 1 million hits each month, Kurtz said.

"We'd had the old design since 1998, and our needs had changed," said Kurtz, who works with the

See SLOW, page 6

First-time buyers, beware

BY ALEX VEIGA

AP Business Writer

LOS ANGELES — Like so many California home hunters struggling to balance affordability with a humane commute, Patricia and Ricardo Cavillo suffer a fundamental disadvantage — because they don't own now, they're struggling to muster the financial clout to buy at all.

The bank said the Cavillos only qualify for a \$200,000 mortgage, but the median home price far

exceeds \$500,000 in Orange County, where Ricardo works a \$38,000-a-year manufacturing job and the couple currently rents. Even a small two-bedroom condominium rarely fetches less than \$300,000.

"When I see the price of these homes, I get depressed," said Patricia Cavillo, 41, a homemaker and mother of three young children. "I think my dream won't become reality."

So the Cavillos remain in the

See HOMES, page 6

Top 20 U.S. cities with the highest home prices

By The Associated Press

These U.S. metropolitan areas had the highest median sale price for existing single-family homes in the second quarter of 2004:

1. Orange County, Calif.: \$655,300
2. San Francisco Bay area: \$647,300
3. San Diego: \$559,700
4. Honolulu: \$451,000
5. Los Angeles: \$438,400
6. Nassau/Suffolk, N.Y.: \$414,800
7. Bergen/Passaic, N.J.: \$393,300
8. New York/North New Jersey/Long Island/Connecticut: \$392,200
9. Newark, N.J.: \$370,600

10. Boston: \$366,500
11. Washington, D.C./Maryland/Virginia: \$352,400
12. Middlesex/Somerset/Hunterdon, N.J.: \$346,800
13. Monmouth/Ocean, N.J.: \$314,300
14. Sacramento, Calif.: \$308,600
15. Riverside/San Bernardino, Calif.: \$294,500
16. West Palm Beach/Boca Raton/Delray Beach, Fla.: \$294,000
17. Seattle: \$293,200
18. Worcester, Mass.: \$279,200
19. Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood/Pompano Beach, Fla.: \$277,300
20. Miami/Hialeah, Fla.: \$271,900

Source: National Association of Realtors

Jacquie Banks

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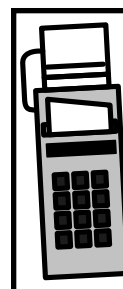


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Balance your checkbook, Virgo

JACQUELINE BIGAR'S STARS The stars show the kind of day you'll have:

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

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

★★★★ Pick and choose your words with care, especially with a touchy person in your life. Right now, this person might be quite depressed. Don't take others personally. Detach a bit from what is going on. Tonight: Celebrate the weekend.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

★★★★ Dig into work. Make a serious effort to clear your desk and return messages. Certainly, you don't want to think about work at home or take it with you. Be willing to stay a little late to accomplish what you must. Tonight: Easy does it.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20)

★★★★ Your finances could hold you back from really letting loose. Symbolically, a Ford will get you to the same place as a Porsche. You don't always have to go first class. Be inventive with friends. Make that call to that special person. Tonight: Kick up your heels.

CANCER (June 21-July 22)

★★★ You might be causing yourself problems where there are none. Be honest with yourself: Are you projecting negativity? Get feedback from those who have known you for many years. Break past boundaries. Tonight: Head home.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)

★★★★ You might think you are telling it like it is, but your vision cannot take in all the details. Pressure builds in a conversation. You might be projecting some of yourself into what is being said. Detach if you can. You are very sensitive right now. Tonight: Hook up with friends.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

★★★ Details that surround money and a friendship might make a situation very difficult. You aren't going to get what you want right now. When you lend funds don't expect them to be returned. Look at this exchange as a gift, should you decide to help someone. Tonight: Balance your checkbook.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)

★★★★★ Events surround you, and you have many choices. Someone who is key to you might need some extra time at the end of the day. Do your best. A meeting proves to be important and could dissolve into a Friday-afternoon get-together. Tonight: Ask, and you shall receive.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)

★★★ Maintain a low profile. Your instincts work with a boss or authority figure. You will gain financially by carefully checking out information and news. Don't listen to gossip or hearsay. Tonight: Get some needed rest.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

★★★★★ Meetings, groups and crowds help you get what you want. You might manipulate a meeting to get the results you desire. You have the unique ability to see what others don't. You present a strong case. No one can disagree because of your verbal presentation and logic. Tonight: Could a partner be jealous?

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

★★★ Someone or several people could be quite difficult. You might want to bypass some of your advisers or co-workers. Just take command of what you can and clear out a problem. A key person supports you. Tonight: Out on the town.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

★★★★ Despite the fact that you don't feel A-OK, you make a strong effort to complete your work. Others will chip in if you ask. Don't hesitate. A friend makes a big difference, even if his or her approach is different from yours. Tonight: Take off. If you can, split town.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)

★★★★ You might be disappointed by a loved one you really care about. Understand what is happening through a chat, perhaps later in the day. Be supportive of a partner. This person needs your help and energy. Tonight: Dinner for two.

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LOCAL



COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Elks send SM man on pilgrimage

By Daily Press staff

The Santa Monica Elks Lodge was one of dozens of sponsors of Michael Strawsburg on a nine-week pilgrimage in what’s called a “short term sports ministry.” The sponsors paid the transportation and lodging costs. Each team member specialized in some sport — Strawsburg specialized in basketball, volleyball and soccer.

The youth, Strawburg, 19, spent one week in training, under the auspices of “uncharted waters.” Then there was a two-week practice session working with underprivileged children in the Midwest. Each team member would work with a small group of children and teach them sports knowledge. That was followed with spiritual instruction, which was normally singing religious songs and putting on religious skits.

Jazzing up the pier

By Daily Press staff

Listen to live jazz while watching the classic film “The Pink Panther.” Continuing to find ways to build partnerships to present free concerts and events, the Santa Monica College Madison Performance Series has announced a special Henry Mancini Institute concert at 7 p.m., Sept. 7, which will precede the screening of The Pink Panther at the Santa Monica Pier.

The Henry Mancini Institute Jazz Alumni Quintet will play musical selections that include well-known film scores, culminating with Mancini’s Pink Panther theme. The live jazz will be followed by the screening of the film classic.

The special event kicks off the Madison Performance Series’ fall season, which also will include a mini dance festival at the pier and a return of the acclaimed SMC Youth Opera Camp production of Brundibár, both scheduled for October.

The Pink Panther event, held as part of the Santa Monica Drive-in at the Pier series, is free, but tickets are required. They can be reserved by calling (310) 458-8935 or going to www.smff.com.

“We’re excited to kick off our sixth season with such a fun family event that combines music with comedy,” said Adam Philipson, coordinator of the Madison Performance Series.

“This concert demonstrates the perfect blend of bringing together a classic film, a great public venue and the legacy of the man who wrote the unforgettable score for Pink Panther,” said Dale Franzen, director of the Madison Project of Santa Monica College, which produces the Madison Performance Series.

Santa Monica Drive-in at the Pier is sponsored by the Santa Monica Pier Restoration Corp. and DEFMAN, a private nonprofit established to help cancer patients, to benefit The Cancer Relief Fund. The Mancini concert is cosponsored by The Madison Project of Santa Monica College, Henry Mancini Institute, Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation and the Ambrose Hotel in Santa Monica.

“We’re excited about our partnership with the Madison Project to provide world-class musical entertainment at our screening of The Pink Panther,” said Ben Franz-Knight, executive director of the Santa Monica Pier Restoration Corp.

The highly popular Madison Performance Series is designed to introduce new audiences to the type of programming that will be at the planned 500-seat performing arts center at SMC’s historic Madison site in central Santa Monica. The arts education and community outreach series includes music, dance, theater, children’s events, spoken word and more.

The Henry Mancini Institute was founded in 1977 to bring music into kindergarten-through-12th-grade schools and community sites. The institute’s projects include the After-School Program, School Partnerships Program, Beyond the Bell Concert Series and the Community Combos Program.



SURF REPORT

Look for mainly leftover energy out of the S, with small NW wind swell and a touch of new SW swell building on Friday. South Bay spots will stay shadowed from the S swell but NW windswell will offer some knee-high surf at most spots, with sets to waist-high at best breaks. Northern LA breaks with good exposure to the S swell see inconsistent knee- to waist-high waves through the morning, while the standout spots pull in some bigger sets to shoulder-high on occasion. Expect less size and consistency as we head into the afternoon.

Look for mostly light wind on Friday morning with building W winds in the 8-10 knot range through the afternoon.

Today the water is:

64°

Write us at wood@smdp.com and tell us what the surf is doing today at your local break.



LOW TIDES

HIGH TIDES

	Morning	Height	Evening	Height	Morning	Height	Evening	Height
SATURDAY	3:42	-0.3	2:53	2.4	10:12	4.1	9:01	6.2
SUNDAY	4:08	-0.4	3:27	2.2	10:34	4.2	9:34	6.2
MONDAY	4:34	-0.3	4:01	2.0	10:57	4.4	10:06	6.0
TUESDAY	4:59	-0.2	4:39	1.9	11:21	4.6	10:40	5.7
WEDNESDAY	5:25	0.1	5:20	1.8	11:47	4.7	11:17	5.3
THURSDAY	5:50	0.5	6:08	1.7	N/A	N/A	12:15	4.9
FRIDAY	6:17	1.0	7:07	1.6	12:00	4.7	12:47	5.0

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The QLine

There recently have been several opinion pieces printed in the Daily Press from residents complaining about the increase in jets taking off and landing at Santa Monica Airport. They are concerned about jet fuel emissions, environmental damage, noise and the increased likelihood of a plane crashing into nearby homes.

The letters to the editor were fueled by a guest commentary printed in the Aug. 11 edition by a Santa Monica resident who is heading up a group called “Concerned Residents

Against Airport Pollution” that plans to make its concerns an election issue this year for City Council candidates.

So, this week Q-Line wants to know, “Does the increase of jet traffic in Santa Monica concern you? What can local politicians do to solve the problem?”

Call (310) 285-8106 before Friday at 5 p.m. and we’ll print your response in the weekend edition. Please limit your comments to a minute or less. It might help to think first about the wording of your response.

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OPINION

Attention highway patrol: Thanks for the memories



POLITIGIRL

BY BETH SOLOMON

WASHINGTON — I've had some trouble with the police lately. Again.

Earlier this year I wrote about driving across country with an expired California registration. I was first stopped by an officer outside Pt. Reyes National Seashore. He wasn't happy about my expired registration. But he was more concerned about my plans to drive my 1990 Nissan truck home to Washington, D.C.

"You'll make it," he said doubtfully. The officer waved me on without a ticket, suggesting front-end work. Later I found out what that meant. I got some. It worked.

The front-end work was so good that I got all the way to Utah, where I was stopped by an officer just east of Salt Lake City. The officer pointed out that my license plate wasn't properly mounted. I agreed with him and offered that the improper mounting probably obscured the fact that my registration had expired. He wasn't happy about that. But he kindly held up the back window of the truck (the hinge no longer works) while I rifled

through my files to find the paper work showing the expired registration. At that point we both discovered that my insurance would expire the following day.

The officer scratched his head, warned me to update the insurance, and complimented me for wearing a seatbelt. No ticket. At this point I realized that legal standards for vehicular operation in the United States were dropping rapidly.

In Arkansas, an officer roared off the median to recount all my offenses to me again. He gave me a \$100 ticket, which seemed rather steep given the genial manner in which I had been treated by officers throughout the rest of the country. Wasn't the South supposed to be the land of hospitality and charm?

I didn't hold it against him — I just knew that the Arkansas Department of the Treasury would have trouble collecting money on a dead registration. I wish them the best, however. Aside from my ticket, I loved "The Natural State," which some people call "The Razorback State" in reference to the athletic teams of the University of Arkansas. A razorback is a thin, long-legged wild hog resident in Arkansas.

But the pleasant nature of my encounters with the police is no excuse for not registering it when I got back to Washington. It was silly. It was lazy.

Even though I thought I would sell the car, I should have gone through the steps to register it legally first. But I didn't.

So when an officer in Maine last week pulled me over in a speed trap, I knew I was in a bit more hot water than before. The registration had been expired for eight months. This officer was more unhappy than all the officers I had encountered, put together. They have long winters in Maine. These people are serious in the happiest of circumstances.

My officer was no exception. "I could have you towed and throw the book at you, I could just start listing the offenses and throw you in jail," he said angrily.

It was even worse, because my mother was in the car. She was not pleased. Actually, she was livid. And not at him.

The Maine policeman went back to his car and looked up the tag.

"Elizabeth," he said. "Your license plate is now registered to a black Toyota. You can't do this!"

I agreed. He wasn't finished with me. "Elizabeth," he repeated, "you can't just make up the rules as you go along!"

He sounded convincing. But he admitted the ticket he was about to write me was not worth the paper it was written on.

So last week, just before I got my car unequivocally registered once in for all in the District of Columbia, an officer

stopped me in Georgetown as I was rushing to an important meeting over cocktails.

"Uhh, ma'am," the officer said, "your registration has been expired for eight months, and you've got a brake light out."

"Officer," I said sincerely, "you don't know the half of it. These tags are registered to a black Toyota in California. It's crazy."

It's hard to shock a member of the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department, but the officer did look somewhat taken aback. He returned to his vehicle as my friend and I sat in traffic, perspiring due to the heat or due to the potential of not getting to the cocktail hour — I'm not sure which.

The officer returned with two warning tickets with no fines.

He urged me sincerely to get my car registered, which I promised to do, and — finally — did.

My car is now inspected, legal, registered, unequivocally lawful and, under the statutes of the District of Columbia and the U.S. of A. — officially approved. I'm a law-abiding, upstanding, Pledge-of-Allegiance-saying, tax-paying, Athens-watching, job-holding, honest-to-God regular citizen.

Now what do I do?

(Beth Solomon is reachable at bethsolomon@earthlink.net).

First date doldrums: The 'boob' factor prevails



PISTACHIO PERSPECTIVE

BY SUSAN ANN CONNOR

The lights were dim. The cell phones no longer competed with fabulous Frank on the sound system. Only our wine glasses remained on the rose-colored table cloth.

Then, it happened. Tim put his arm over the back of my chair and stared straight ahead. There was profundity in the air. Or, so I thought. Suddenly he spoke, slowly and methodically, "You know Susan, I wake up in the morning, and I look in the mirror, and I say to myself, 'I like Tim. I like the way Tim walks, I like the way Tim talks. I ... like ... Tim.'"

Hmmmm, I pondered, as I took a swig of water to wash down Tim's moment of self awareness. I choked, naturally, and excused myself to go to the ladies room, where I decided I didn't like the way Tim

talks. His walk was OK, but his talk was not exactly what I was looking for.

Instinct suggested bolting out the back door. I'd had enough of Tim. The entire evening had been all about Tim, Tim, Tim. A fleeting fantasy occurred of being safely home, in my sweats, watching Charlie Rose and finishing that piece of chocolate cheesecake. But as I stealthily headed to the exit sign, my intellect kicked in, recommending I head on back to Tim, bloody bored as I was.

And I could hear my mother's voice inside my head reminding me to mind my manners. My manners? Sheesh — what about his? He hadn't stopped talking about himself since we got there.

"Never mind his, mind your own," I heard her again.

All right, all right, I whispered to myself as I turned toward Tim. It was probably a good idea anyway, since one of my current employers fixed us up. I wasn't going to let the outcome of a bad dating experience get in the way of my income. So I returned and tolerated Tim.

This was a first date, and I had gotten

way too much information about my escort within the first hour of our conversation. (Note to Tim: Dr. Phil says, "Don't share everything on a first date.") When he called a few days later for a future rendezvous and to tell me he was thinking "soulmates," I responded in the only way I could. "Tim, I'm afraid that first date was also our last."

I relayed that decision kindly, but he warned me that I would be sorry. So far, I haven't been.

I called Clare after my date with Tim feeling the need to share. She was amused and empathetic at my being caught in the dating web with a loquacious narcissistic boob. Prior to her marriage, she had her own experience on a blind date with a similar sort of boob. He showed up, she told me, with several of his short stories and proceeded to read them out loud in the dining booth, without even a scant, "Do you mind?" or "What do you think?" or any other sign of social etiquette.

Apparently, this boob factor is not confined to just men. Women can be boobs, too. Well, you know what I mean.

Anyway, my long time male compadre, Jack, complains of the boobness of certain females. When I asked him why he thought people behave this way, so unaware of the other person, he took a psychological shortcut and merely said, "It's a mystery, babe."

It certainly is a mystery. Each of us have our own shortcomings, our own gifts and reasons why we are the way we are. BUT ... if you are going to date, at least learn to listen. Ask questions. Everybody has a story. You might even find their story as fascinating as yours.

A very wise old man once told me, "Learn to take the attention off of yourself and put it on the other person." Once you do that, you open up to a whole new world outside of yourself. The focus can be mesmerizing and downright inspirational. Then if things go well, the other person might pick up on it, reciprocate and actually be interested in you, too. What a balanced concept! Lalalala ...

(Susan Ann Connor can be reached at pistachiocolumn@aol.com).

OPINIONS EXPRESSED are those of the writer and do not necessarily reflect those of the Santa Monica Daily Press staff. Guest editorials from residents are encouraged, as are letters to the editor. Letters will be published on a space-available basis. It is our intention to publish all letters we receive, except those that are libelous or are unsigned. Preference will be given to those that are e-mailed to sack@smdp.com. All letters must include the author's name and telephone number for purposes of verification. Letters also may be mailed to our offices located at 1427 Third Street Promenade, Suite 202, Santa Monica, 90401, or faxed to (310) 576-9913. All letters and guest editorials are subject to editing for space and content.



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LOCAL



Resolution of civil cases could be a long way off

FARMERS' MARKET, from page 1

who lives with his wife in a home north of Montana Avenue, will be protected from discovery in the civil lawsuits at least until early December, after a preliminary criminal trial against him is completed, Judge Baker decided Monday. She also ruled to consolidate the manifold pending investigations into City Hall's liability, in order to simplify and expedite the court proceedings.

Judge Baker on Monday also presided over a series of motions related to aspects of the case that are expected to be raised again at trial. Included among those issues were whether victims should be allowed to pursue Weller for punitive damages and whether Weller's crash into a Mercedes sedan on Fourth Street should be considered separately from his fatal drive through the outdoor market. If it is, lawyers are expected to argue Weller was fleeing from the scene of the earlier accident. Judge Baker reserved final judgment in those and a handful of other matters until later in the civil proceedings.

The proceedings were the first heard by Judge Baker since an appeals court intervened two weeks ago. Last month, she ordered released a 914-page police report into the crash, which civil lawyers had been waiting for months to review. Citing First Amendment considerations, she also ordered it be handed over to members of the media, but later changed her mind at the urging of prosecutors and Weller's attorneys, who argued the report would hinder the pending preliminary criminal trial against Weller.

As a compromise, Judge Baker agreed

to release the report, but with certain portions edited out, including a 42-page statement given by Weller to police immediately after the crash and a similar statement given to police by his wife. Not satisfied, lawyers in the criminal case appealed the ruling, and on Aug. 2 the California Second District Court of Appeals put a temporary stay on all proceedings in the civil lawsuits. That stay was modified Aug. 12 to allow the civil cases to go forward, but keep the report sealed.

Police and other investigators who have looked into the accident say Weller likely mistook the accelerator for the brake pedal and, when he realized his mistake, instinctively pressed on it harder.

The matter could take years to resolve. The preliminary criminal trial is expected to take two to three weeks, after which the judge will decide whether enough evidence exists to try the case before a jury. Prosecutors have charged Weller with 10 counts of vehicular manslaughter with gross negligence.

Charlie Schmitt, one of Weller's attorneys focusing on the civil proceedings, said he doesn't expect a resolution in the civil arena soon. Schmitt is one of five attorneys working for Weller.

"It will not move beyond this phase, which is kind of herding the cats, so to speak, until the end of the year," he said during a court break. "I would imagine you wouldn't see a trial date until the end of 2005."

Even that could be up in the air, Schmitt added, pending the outcome of the criminal case.

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Web site accessibility, user friendliness questioned

SLOW, from page 1

equivalent of two full-time employees to operate the site. "The way the people use the World Wide Web has evolved. The amount of information that we offer on the site has grown enormously. So the navigation tools on the old site were not as nice as we'd liked them to be."

The redesigned site features multiple navigation modes and an area to post updates and changing news, as well as new multimedia features such as elaborate pull-down menus. Kurtz said the city decided to adopt increasingly sophisticated standards because of the improvement of web browsers — the programs that turn programming code into fully designed Web pages.

"It's astonishing the new capabilities of the new computer systems," Kurtz said. "As we see those becoming more widespread, what that does is give us the ability to offer more complex services online."

However, the sophisticated design also

might be contributing to a Web site residents say is slower than before it was upgraded. Kurtz said the city is addressing speed and loading issues by putting in a new server and installing a new type of network on city computers.

D.L. Byron, a web designer at Seattle-based Textura Design and an expert in web standards and accessibility for the Web Standards Project, said it appears that the city has gone in a little over its head. He scoffed at the idea that a new server would solve the Web site's speed issues, which he described as "super slow."

"This code is just bloated with javascript, flash detection, so there's a lot the page is trying to process when it's coming in," Byron said. The Web Standards Project is a grassroots coalition fighting for standards that ensure simple and affordable access to web technologies for all users. "From our perspective, this is coded like it's 1999."

Byron said that short of a complete

redesign, a reduction in the site's bandwidth — the total size of the files the server sends to users when they visit the page — would speed it up. He described the site's code as "jammed" and said the fancy pull-down menus were probably slowing it down considerably.

Steve Chapin, the president of Vision Internet, cautioned against perceived quick fixes.

"There are so many different things," Chapin said. "You can't necessarily blame the system that they're using or the hardware, the software, or the server, because there are so many different factors involved. Unfortunately, it's not a science."

Byron was sure about one thing, however — that the site does not pass the "Bobby" or "Cynthia" tests, commonly used programs that check whether a Web site is accessible to users with special needs. He said the Web site's speed issues are more problematic, considering it is

expected to serve all the people who live in a diverse community.

"That's just totally unacceptable," Byron said. "Not only is it slow, it declares itself being accessible, but it's not. If you have users that are blind, old people who have trouble reading ... they will have problems following complex Web sites like this."

Kurtz dismissed any criticism about accessibility, pointing out that users with special needs could successfully navigate the site, though they would be unable to see many of the site's graphic features. Above all, he said, the Web site works.

"We made some assumptions," he said, listing a group of browser and display specifications. "When you hire a vendor, you have to put that into a software specification, and those seemed like reasonable assumptions. I know there are people (who don't fit those assumptions), but we decided that that didn't give us enough to put up the info that we needed to put up."

Housing status divides society

HOMES, from page 1

mix of would-be first-time homebuyers for whom low home-loan interest rates are as much a tease as an invitation to ownership in anywhere but the state's outlying areas. Instead, they'll continue renting a two-bedroom apartment for \$925 per month.

"We're headed into a society where we have housing haves and housing have-nots, where we have a rental class and a homeowner class," according to John Landis, chairman of the Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of California, Berkeley.

Last year, the percentage of all home buyers statewide who were purchasing their first home fell to a 22-year-low, according to the California Association of Realtors. First-time owners accounted for just 31 percent of all the existing homes purchased here last year, the association reported. The national share was 40 percent in the first quarter of 2003, according to the most recent data from the National Association of Realtors.

While the historically low mortgage rates that spurred a nationwide home-buying binge have helped some Californians break into the market, the mortgage math hardly seems to add up for many of those who manage to buy.

As has become a California custom, John Carpenter found himself overbidding by \$20,000 the \$385,000 list price for a three-bedroom town house in the Los Angeles suburb of Thousand Oaks. Prospects looked good until another bidder, one of four others, offered to plunk down 20 percent in cash.

The 40-year-old public school teacher couldn't match that — not given his \$55,000 annual salary, plus perhaps another \$20,000 from tutoring and giving fencing lessons.

"Most of them are ludicrously expensive," Carpenter said of homes which routinely list above a half-million dollars. "It's crazy. Absolutely crazy."

After weeks of looking, a seller recently accepted Carpenter's \$353,000 bid for a 1,050-square-foot town house — and he only had to pay \$4,000 over the list price.

Los Angeles isn't even as bad as it gets. In the first half of this year, the metropolitan areas of Orange County, San

Francisco and San Diego had the nation's highest median home prices — prices which have climbed steadily since the mid 1990s. At \$438,000, Los Angeles ranked fifth, behind Honolulu.

It wasn't always so.

In the 1970s, the median price for an existing, single-family detached home in California was in line with the national figure. In June it was well more than double — \$469,170 compared to \$191,800, according to the Realtors associations — a price tag fewer than 1 in 5 California households can afford.

Overbidding — once a syndrome chronic to desirable coastal hubs including San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego — has spread east. Bidding wars have encroached into inland counties such as Riverside and San Bernardino, where buyers priced out of Los Angeles and Orange counties snap up newly developed swaths of desert and drive some the state's highest appreciation rates.

So far this year, Riverside and San Bernardino have seen home prices rise by more than 35 percent over 2003. Prices in Los Angeles County have gone up almost as fast.

Those who look near the coast can be blinded by what they must pay.

Before landing their Santa Monica condominium in April, Mary Becker and her husband lost out on two other condos — one priced at \$384,000, the other at \$390,000 — despite offering between \$5,000 to \$10,000 over the asking price. Both ultimately went to buyers who offered between \$30,000 and \$50,000 more.

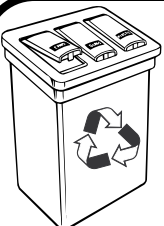
"It was a big reality check," said Becker, a 26-year-old yoga instructor.

With a combined annual income of around \$140,000, the couple eventually landed a two-bedroom condominium for \$465,000 — nearly double what they set out to spend. Their total monthly housing bill: \$2,200.

"We did extend to our max just about," she said. "So we're kind of dealing with how to make that all work."

Even those intent on not overpaying have buckled.

Hollywood attorney Ingrid Auyon swore she wouldn't enter a bidding war, but ended up offering \$35,000 over the \$575,000 asking price for the 1,000-square-foot home she bought in the spring.

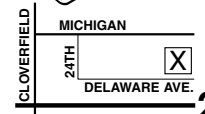


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STATE



YWCA's take controversial step of adding men

BY JESSICA GRESKO

Associated Press Writer

SAN DIEGO — "Please NO men or boys allowed on elevator," warns one sign at San Diego's downtown YWCA. Informational e-mails are called "hot flashes" and tablecloths come in pink.

But changes are coming to this YWCA and others nationwide. For the first time men have joined the San Diego chapter's governing board, making it among the first nationwide to end an almost 150-year-old policy of female-only leadership.

The shift, implemented in July in violation of the YWCA's national bylaws, is proving neither easy nor uncontested.

Meeting in Massachusetts last weekend, the YWCA's national board said it would wait before deciding how to reconcile its formal policy with the new direction several local chapters have taken.

Particularly on the East Coast, members of some YWCAs want their boards to remain the domain of women, and leaders there believe if U.S. chapters change, YWCAs worldwide might feel pressure to follow.

"There is something very powerful about women closing the door and sitting around a board room, identifying their issues and then resolving them," said Mary Reardon Johnson, executive director of the YWCA of Western Massachusetts.

YWCA leaders in San Diego and three other chapters that have opened their boards counter that the switch lets them tap talent previously off limits and reflects one of the organization's central goals — stamping out discrimination.

"Men and women do think differently. When you have multiple perspectives on an issue you can make better decisions,"

said Lambert Hsu, one of three men now on San Diego's board.

Meanwhile, public and private funders wary of the women-only policy have pushed at least one local YWCA to change.

But the inclusion of men does present challenges, big and small.

At Hsu's first board meeting, discussions on a new building and the budget went smoothly. Anyone who asked about the elevator sign learned the rule protects the privacy of female residents at a shelter upstairs.

One concern that did come before the 24-member board was practical: Where's the men's room?

It's a question not often asked at YWCAs. The organization has about 300 chapters nationally that run programs predominantly for women — shelters for domestic violence victims, child care centers and job training programs. A few YWCAs share some facilities and staff with YMCAs, but the two are distinct organizations. Women have been members of YMCA leadership for over 70 years.

The YWCA membership reflects the institution's mission. Men can volunteer, donate and become associate members, but under national rules only women can vote on their chapter's policies and men are ineligible for the governing boards.

Though the national organization says it doesn't track the trend, San Diego appears to be the fourth to add men. The Tucson, Ariz., chapter elected three board members in January and one man joined the board at the Berkeley YWCA in July, as did three men in Portland, Ore. YWCAs in Madison, Wis., Seattle and Olympia, Wash., have changed their

bylaws to let men serve, though their members haven't elected male members.

In response, the national board created a gender task force last year. The committee circulated a 15-page summary of the issue to chapters across the country and presented a status report last weekend at the national meeting. The task force next will suggest how the YWCA should proceed, said national board Chairwoman Glenda DuBoise, in recommendations that could be ready as early as November.

The board's circumspection reflects the issue's emotional charge. Not least of some leaders' concerns is that including men might pressure the worldwide YWCA, which in some parts of the globe provides a rare women-only haven.

"The most passion that I have heard is connected to the women in the rest of the world who need the YWCA umbrella strong to keep them safe," said Roz Branson, the executive director of the YWCA of Greater Baltimore.

Other leaders point out the simple fact

that if the change spreads, it would eliminate one of the longest-running women-only groups — and that the YWCA's focus on women might blur over time if men are allowed to make decisions at the highest levels.

But leaders at chapters such as Tucson's counter that excluding men simply won't work anymore.

Director Janet Marcotte said her particular group runs a large racial justice program, and that it felt awkward to preach tolerance when her own board was exclusive.

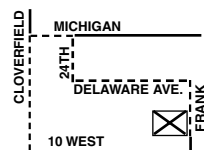
One of Marcotte's new colleagues, Tucson board member Tim Wernette, agrees. He hopes he adds something as a white man who vocally supports feminism and anti-racism work.

Still, as the Tucson chapter's board changes, Wernette tries to avoid muscling in on board discussions.

"I'm real sensitive to the air time I take during meetings," Wernette said. "I don't want to dominate."

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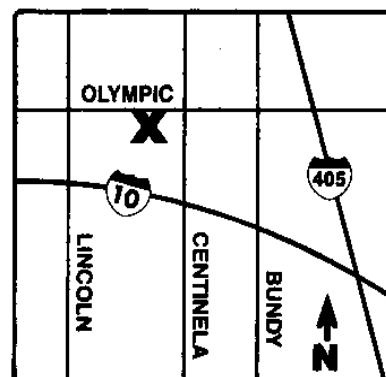


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Entertainment

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Starring: Naomi Watts, Mark Ruffalo, Laura Dern, Peter Krause

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Eclectic, jazzy, color-saturated sets and costumes are a perfect match for the money- and alcohol-saturated, animated characters.
Starring: Emily Mortimer

COLLATERAL

Cruise makes for one bad-ass bad guy in this unsettling thrill ride from director Michael Mann.
Starring: Tom Cruise, Jamie Foxx

OPEN WATER

If you thought the crew in "Jaws" was screwed out there in their little boat, wait 'til you see what happens to the unfortunate young couple in this one.
Starring: Daniel Travis, Blanchard Ryan

LITTLE BLACK BOOK

No one deserves to watch this movie—and its pot-holed, nonsensical plot—unfold.
Starring: Brittany Murphy, Ron Livingston

CODE 46

It's difficult to wrap one's head around the film's basic conceit because as lovers, Robbins and Morton generate less heat than a meat locker.
Starring: Tim Robbins, Samantha Morton

THE VILLAGE

The final act shocker isn't worth enduring the rest of the film.
Starring: Joaquin Phoenix, Bryce Dallas Howard, William Hurt

THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE

Director Jonathan Demme returns to "Silence of the Lambs"-type form, taking us on a suspenseful journey rife with intrigue and fueled by paranoia.
Starring: Denzel Washington, Meryl Streep

THE BOURNE SUPREMACY

A stellar sequel awash with superb performances and edge-of-the-seat action sequences.
Starring: Matt Damon, Joan Allen, Brian Cox

A CINDERELLA STORY

A vapid collection of clichés and stereotypes that have already been exhausted in at least three other teen-girl-in-turmoil films this year.
Starring: Hilary Duff

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MARIA FULL OF GRACE

It's easy to see why this gut-wrenching film won the Dramatic Audience Award at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival.
Starring: Catalina Sandino Moreno

RIDING GIANTS

There's plenty here to capture the imagination of damn near anyone with the slightest sense of adventure. An entertaining and highly informative tutorial on the history of big-wave surfing.
Starring: Laird Hamilton, Greg Noll

‘Without a paddle’ is surprisingly OK

BY DAN DUNN
Special to the Daily Press

Judging by the trailer, this looked to be a forgettable farce that would serve only to reinforce the commonly-held notion among cinephiles that Seth Green's film career is the film gods' way of punishing us for some uncertain past sin. Ah, but sometimes looks are a bit deceiving, and so it is with this surprisingly, uh, *OK* film from director Steven Brill. Surprising not only in that Brill's previous two efforts — "Mr. Deeds" and "Little Nicky" — have been anything but OK, but that the diminutive Green is pretty darn good here as well.

"Without a Paddle" is certainly far from great, but it keeps its distance from awful as well. And that's saying something, given that quality is not the hallmark of August releases.

Green, Matthew Lillard and Dax Shepard (of "Punk'd" infamy) star as three lifelong friends who go on a canoe trip in search of lost treasure and wind up discovering a lot more than they bargained for about each other. City slickers answering the call of the wild is a conventional premise, to be sure, but the writing (the screenplay is credited to Jay Leggett and Mitch Rouse) is lively at times and the performances winning. Lillard, especially, is on the mark here, though it's difficult to hear him speak without being reminded of Shaggy.

A great many gags pander to the homophobic instincts of the young male audience Brill et al hope to lure to the theaters, but nothing overtly offensive made the cut. Burt Reynolds, who was stranded in the wilderness (and in much more dire straits) in the seminal 1972 film "Deliverance," is amusing as Del Knox, a recluse who's been hiding in the Pacific Northwest for 30 years. Further strengthening the homage to John Boorman's classic are Ethan Suplee and Abraham Benrubi as a pair of lawless cretins who would like nothing more than to make our heroes squeal like pigs. Weeeee!

(Rated PG-13 for drug content, sexual material, language, crude humor and some violence. Running time: 95 minutes)

Matthew Lillard paddling toward success in latest film

BY DAN DUNN
Special to the Daily Press

Matthew Lillard, best known for his roles in "Scooby Doo" and "Scream," has made more than 30 films in his 13-year career. The 33-year-old Michigan native's latest picture, "Without a Paddle," is an adventure-comedy co-starring Seth Green and Dax Shepard.

There are several action sequences in "Without a Paddle."

QUESTION: Did you do many of your own stunts?

MATTHEW LILLARD: Most of them, yes. Shooting in the lovely country of New Zealand, where they invented the sport of jumping off the side of a bridge with a rubberband attached to your foot, really helped. The great thing about the action stuff is that you can see us, really scared.

Q: So you were afraid riding those rapids?

ML: It was the most intense film experience I've ever had. We had such small life preservers because they had to fit under our costumes. And none of us had any body fat — we were all in shape because we had to be in our underwear for six weeks. So when you got dumped in the



water, it was pretty scary.

Q: Are you an "extreme" type of guy?

ML: I'm not a real thrill-seeker. On our days off, Dax was out riding dune buggies and jumping off bridges. Me, I like to do this thing called reading. I like being an actor, but I don't necessarily like being an actor who (does his own stunts).

Q: There's a very funny scene in which the three of you are forced to huddle together in your underwear. Was it awkward, like doing a love scene?

ML: The cuddling scene was nothing like doing a love scene. Nothing! No erections were had in the course of making this movie. OK, maybe one or two, but not in that scene.

Q: You mentioned the film being shot in New Zealand. Does it bother you that an American film about the Pacific Northwest is made overseas because it's cheaper?

ML: It drives me crazy. Let me tell you right now, it's a real problem. What's happening now is that right-to-work states and foreign countries are giving back half the budget on films, and California can never compete with that. New Zealand is great, and the crews are wonderful,

but our industry in Southern California is being destroyed. There are a lot of very talented people in Southern California that are really fighting for jobs, fighting for their families.

Q: How has it affected you personally?

ML: I've done 30-plus movies, and only two of them have been made in Southern California — and one of those, I produced. Nobody really wants to hear about the plight of an actor like me, but the reality is, I like being home. I like being in my own country. I know that might sound ethnocentric, but I like it here. I've worked all over the world, but I can't work (at home). It's a shame.

Q: You've got a wife and child. What sort of toll does all that traveling exact on your family life?

QL: Last year, I was home all of 12 weeks. And 12 weeks of sex is no good. I think that's the single reason why Hollywood families go to hell in a hand-basket. First of all, the temptation is ridiculous. What Seth Green or Dax Shepard face on a daily basis is different than a plumber in middle America. And you're away from home, so if you don't bring your family with you, you're bound to screw it up in some way.

Q: So you bring your family with you?

ML: Absolutely.

STATE



Heat presents health danger to state's field workers

BY JULIANA BARBASSA

Associated Press Writer

FRESNO — A coroner's investigation has confirmed that a field worker died of heat stroke, a health threat that has killed at least eight farmworkers in California in recent years and has hospitalized dozens more.

The heat can turn deadly with little warning during the grape harvest, when temperatures in California's Central Valley hover near 100 degrees and grape growers have a short window to pick the 6.7 million tons of grapes the state produces each year.

California grows 91 percent of the country's grapes, and workers labor under that pressure. They're often paid by piece rate, which pushes them to work fast, and sometimes to keep working despite dizziness and nausea — heat stroke's early warning signs.

The state's Occupational Health and Safety program keeps records of heat-related deaths in the country's most productive fields — but only in years in which there are three or more deaths, to protect the identity of the employer. In 2002, the last year for which information was available, three workers died because of the heat, their records show. In 1998, four workers died.

In 1992, the last year for which Cal-OSHA provided statistics, 41 agricultural workers were hospitalized for heatstroke. Cal-OSHA only counts hospital stays of more than 24 hours, in which the patient was held for more than just observation.

The numbers of workers who suffered from heat stroke but did not report to the agency, or who were not severely impaired, are not known.

"These workers are outdoors for the full day," said Dean Fryer, a spokesman with Cal-OSHA. "They run the risk of heat exhaustion, which is more prevalent in agriculture, but also in construction."

Asuncion Valdivia, 53, was rushed by his son to Kern

Medical Center after he collapsed July 28 while picking grapes for the Guimarra companies. Valdivia and his son, both natives of Mexico, had been picking grapes for 10 hours.

The coroners' report issued Friday confirmed that Valdivia, described as a well-developed, well-nourished, 160-pound Hispanic male with no traces of drugs or alcohol in his blood, died of heat.

Cal-OSHA provides booklets and training opportunities to farm owners and workers, telling them what to watch for — symptoms that are sometimes hard to catch, such as a loss in concentration, irritability, a rise in body temperature, and less desire to drink water.

Their educational material urges employers to have a system in place to contact a doctor in case of an emergency, and to increase breaks when the temperature rises — neither of which happened in Valdivia's case, his son said.

"We had no trainings, nothing," said Valdivia's 21-year-old son, who had no idea of what was wrong, and what should be done, when his father lost consciousness.

John Guimarra, the family-owned company's vice president, did not immediately respond to repeated calls Tuesday. But in the days after Valdivia's death, company President Joe Guimarra said "we did the best we could to respond adequately."

An ambulance was called, but never came. Valdivia's son said the foreman thought Valdivia was feeling better, and decided

to send him home with his son.

United Farm Workers President Arturo Rodriguez emphasized that while it's always good to train workers in how to respond to emergencies, nothing will happen in the fields without a supervisor's approval.

The UFW has called on farmers — when Valdivia died, and again Tuesday — to train supervisors in how to handle heatstroke, and to have an emergency communication plan in place so that a sick worker can get the care that might save his or her life.

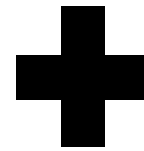
Rodriguez said the union has had no responses from farmers so far.

Some employers do train their supervisors. The Western Growers, an association of farmers, has its own worker safety consultant, who tells crews and foremen about heat stress at the beginning of each season.

"We do trainings as often as possible, especially now, with the heat wave," said Hector Martinez, safety coordinator for Western Growers.

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Border Patrol union says rules ‘muzzle’ critics

BY BEN FOX
Associated Press Writer

TEMECULA — New labor rules proposed by the Department of Homeland Security would muzzle internal critics of the Border Patrol by making it easier to punish and fire agents, who have often been vocal critics of management policies, union officials said.

The new regulations would take effect upon their release, expected in late summer or early fall. As proposed, they would make significant changes to rules covering some 50,000 Homeland Security employees, including immigration, agricultural and customs inspectors on the border.

Homeland Security officials say the regulations would give the agency the flexibility necessary to fight terrorism, but unions representing federal employees say the proposals rules are unfair to workers and would stifle whistleblowers.

“People aren’t going to be willing to talk. It’s going to have a very chilling effect,” T.J. Bonner, president of the National Border Patrol Council, said Wednesday.

A Border Patrol spokesman, Mario Villarreal, said the agency has a good working relationship with the union,

which represents about 10,000 agents. But Bonner, who is also an agent, and others with the council have also been outspoken critics of enforcement efforts.

Since the mid-1990s, the union has aggressively campaigned for agents to be allowed more freedom to roam along the border to apprehend illegal immigrants instead of staying at what it believes are ineffective fixed positions that are intended as visible deterrents to border crossers.

More recently, the union urged Homeland Security officials to allow a mobile patrol unit to resume apprehensions of illegal immigrants in inland cities. The 12-agent group, based out of the Temecula station, made more than 400 arrests in June before the operations were halted amid an outcry by activists and politicians.

Union leaders defended the mobile patrol at a town hall meeting in Temecula on Friday, but Bonner and others said agents would be afraid to be so vocal under the new proposals.

“It would be career suicide, and if you get fired from a law enforcement job it’s a stain,” he said. “It’s the kiss of death for getting another law enforcement job or even menial work.”

The proposed regulations allow the government to fire people for national security reasons under an expedited process; create new mandatory firing offenses and eliminate arbitration for removal, said Mark Roth, general counsel for the American Federation of Government Employees.

The new rules would also allow Homeland Security to control pay raises and make it easier to transfer workers to different regions of the country. “They are literally (making them) second class government employees,” Roth said.

Homeland Security defends the new regulations, saying the changes to disciplinary proceedings “are intended to create a faster, streamlined process that better supports the DHS mission, while ensuring fairness to employees,” according to a statement provided by spokesman Larry Orluskie.

Homeland Scurity released the proposals earlier this year and took comments from unions and others for several months. Roth is hopeful that some changes would be adopted, but Bonner said he is not so optimistic. “This really tilts the balance of power in such a lopsided manner,” he said.

Border Patrol basic training moves closer to U.S.-Mexican border

By The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Incoming Border Patrol agents will train closer to the U.S.-Mexican border when the federal government relocates their academy to Artesia, N.M., Customs and Border Protection announced Thursday.

The agents now train in Glynco, Ga., and Charleston, S.C. The training will be combined in New Mexico where advanced training already is provided for Border

Patrol agents.

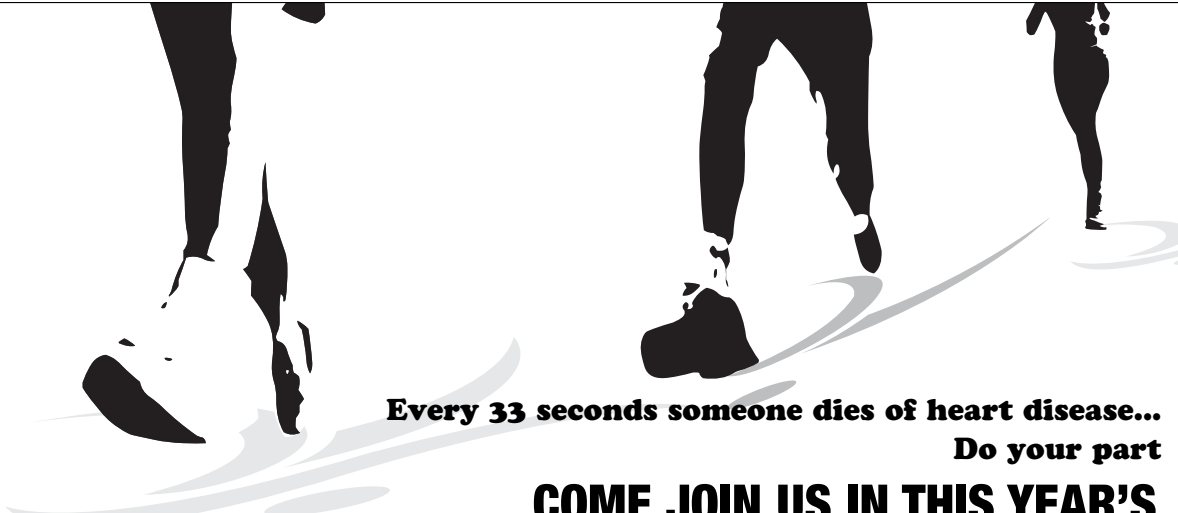
“The location is very similar to the environment they will be working in,” said Mario Villarreal, Customs and Border Protection spokesman. Artesia is in southeastern New Mexico, about 80 miles north of New Mexico’s border with Texas.

Agents receive about five months of basic training before beginning their career. The first basic training class should begin by the end of the year.

“By having the academy in one location, we will be

able to more effectively and efficiently provide a professional training environment to new agents that join,” Robert Bonner, U.S. Customs and Border Protection commissioner said.

Villarreal said money will be spent to relocate the training and expand and improve the Artesia facility, but the merger of the three facilities should result in savings. He said costs and savings figures were not immediately available. The merger should free up space at the other facilities so it can be used by other federal agencies.



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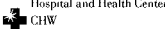
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Report expected to absolve senior commanders

BY ROBERT BURNS

AP Military Writer

WASHINGTON — An Army investigation into the abuse of inmates at Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison will blame at least two dozen people and conclude that while no senior commanders ordered the abusive acts, they should be faulted for inadequate supervision, two defense officials said Thursday.

The officials said the report is expected to be provided to Congress next week. They discussed the matter only on condition of anonymity because it is still under internal review.

In addition to the military intelligence personnel who are a key focus of the investigation report, the Army found that military medical personnel became aware of abuse at Abu Ghraib while treating injured prisoners but failed to report it to their command superiors.

The treatment of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib, the notorious prison where inmates were tortured and killed

during the regime of Saddam Hussein, grew into an international scandal after photographs surfaced last spring showing U.S. soldiers abusing and sexually humiliating prisoners.

An initial Army report, by Maj. Gen. Antonio M. Taguba, said soldiers of the 372nd Military Police Company had committed "sadistic, blatant and wanton" criminal acts at the prison. Of the seven military police soldiers charged with the abuses, one has pleaded guilty; lawyers for the other six have argued that they had followed orders from military intelligence officers.

The New York Times, which first reported the finding on the medical personnel, said in its Thursday editions that it obtained medical records showing that medics had been in the area of the prison where the abuse occurred several times to treat suspicious wounds.

A separate report on the prison cases, launched by Maj. Gen. George R. Fay, examined the role of military intelligence, including the 205th Military Intelligence

Brigade, the unit that was in control of interrogations at Abu Ghraib under the command of Col. Thomas M. Pappas. The Fay investigation found no evidence to directly blame anyone above Pappas, defense officials said Thursday.

Although Fay concluded that no senior commanders ordered, encouraged or condoned the abusive acts, his report said they should be faulted for allowing conditions that led to the misdeeds. Fay found that commanders did not provide sufficient supervision and oversight of the prison system.

The Fay report places direct blame on at least two dozen people, who are expected to face disciplinary action ranging from administrative punishment that could damage or end their military careers to criminal charges, the officials said. The New York Times reported that the two dozen include civilian contractors and CIA officers in addition to Army military intelligence soldiers.

Militant cleric rejects Allawi's final call: 'Martyrdom or victory'

BY ABDUL HUSSEIN AL-OBEIDI

Associated Press Writer

NAJAF, Iraq — Prime Minister Ayad Allawi issued a "final call" Thursday to Shiite insurgents to disarm and withdraw from a revered shrine after his government threatened a massive onslaught by Iraqi forces. As the peace deal for Najaf unraveled, militants bombarded a police station with mortar rounds, killing seven police and injuring 31 others.

Allawi's last-ditch warning came shortly after the militants' leader, radical Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, rejected the government's ultimatum with a vow to seek "martyrdom or victory."

Explosions and gunbattles persisted Thursday through the streets of the holy city of Najaf, wracked by violence since the Shiite militant uprising began two weeks ago. Witnesses said a U.S. warplane fired missiles at a hotel in a neighborhood where Mahdi Army militants were known to take up fighting positions.

U.S. forces and Shiite insurgents also fought in the Baghdad slum of Sadr City, where more than 50 militants and civilians were killed Thursday, Mahdi Army spokesman Na'eem al-Kaabi said.

U.S. tanks moved throughout the streets of the impoverished Baghdad neighborhood on Thursday, and helicopter gunships shot at militants from the skies. The U.S. military had no immediate comment on the operation.

Just a day earlier, al-Sadr — in a letter to a national conference in Baghdad — had accepted a peace plan to disarm his fighters, withdraw from the Imam Ali Shrine and turn to politics in exchange for amnesty. But the cleric also insisted he be allowed to negotiate the terms of the plan's implementation, a demand the government dismissed.

Reiterating the refusal to negotiate with the armed militants, Allawi called on al-Sadr to accept the government demands to end the Najaf fighting personally — not through aides or letters as he has been communicating so far.

"When we hear from him and that he is committed to execute these conditions we will ... give him and his group protection," the prime minister said in a Baghdad news conference.

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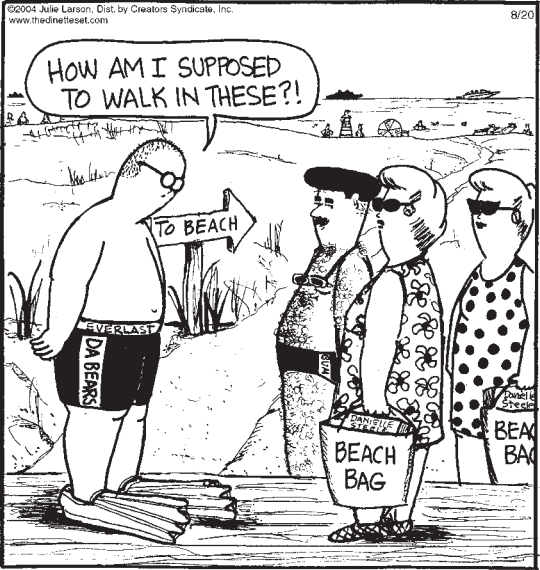
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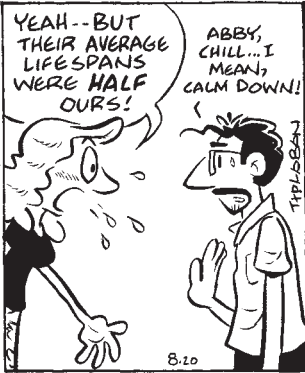
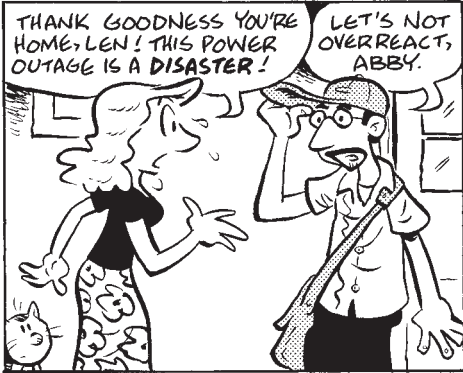


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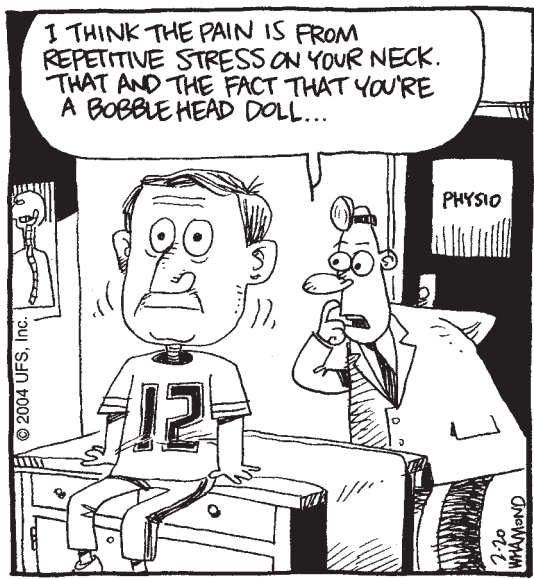
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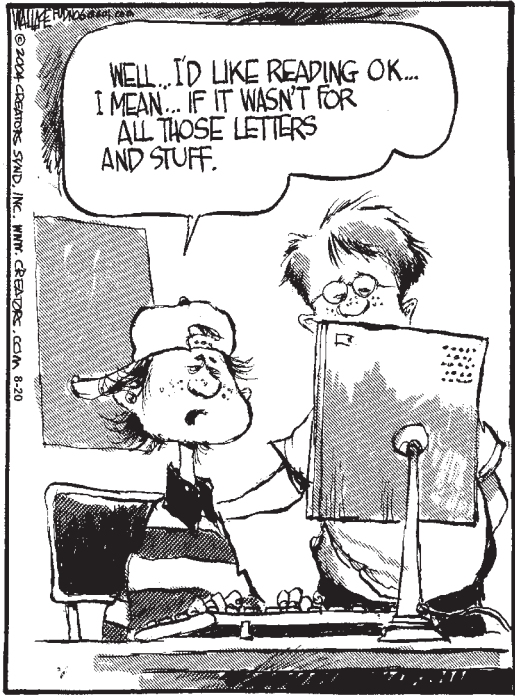
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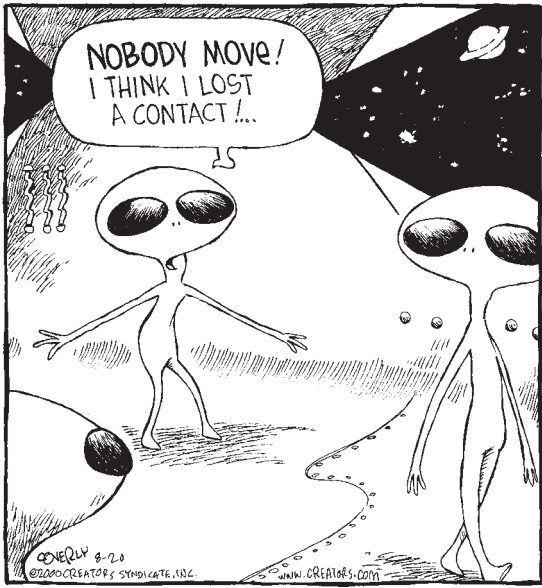
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- 15 1040 entry
- 16 Abbott and Costello movie
- 18 Not pos.
- 19 Eccentric
- 20 Lawn makeup
- 21 Matured
- 23 Brad Pitt film
- 25 Rotter
- 27 (Not my spelling)
- 28 Dead duck
- 30 Cacao holders
- 33 Comfy room
- 34 Steven Tyler's daughter
- 36 Steal
- 37 Active
- 39 Ball point?
- 40 Deserve
- 41 "Gigi" star

43 Bring to mind

- 44 One way to read
- 45 Company division
- 46 Cheery melodies

DOWN

- 1 Track activity
- 2 Fan
- 3 Some PR work
- 4 Candle count
- 5 So old, it's new
- 6 Changes a program
- 7 Noted lab assistant
- 8 Auto option
- 9 Continued
- 10 Place
- 17 Check-cashing needs
- 22 Pale
- 24 Big shot, briefly
- 26 Takes out
- 28 City on the Rhone
- 29 Convoy member
- 31 Become extinct
- 32 Uses up
- 33 Stadium toppers
- 35 Out-spoken
- 38 Boost
- 42 Clay, today

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Must mention this ad at time of write up. Taxes extra.
Expires 09/30/04

Minor Service for only **\$39.95**

Oil Change & Oil Filter Replacement, Lube Hinges, Latches & Applicable Chassis Parts, Silicone Protection of Window Weather Strips, Check Fluid Levels & Top Off to Factory Specifications, Inspect Cooling System, Hoses & Belts, Check Running Lights for Proper Operation, Check Suspension System, Inspect Exhaust System for Corrosion, Inspect & Rotate Tires, Adjust Pressures, Multi-Point Inspection Report Card

Must mention this ad at time of write up.
Excludes diesels & HD "E" & "F" series vehicles/OP code PMinor.
Expires 09/30/04

If you purchased elsewhere ... you probably paid too much!

SANTA MONICA  **1230 Santa Monica Blvd. • 310.451-1588**