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Santa Monica Daily Press
FRIDAY
10.26.18
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CANDIDATE PROFILES 2018

City Council



SUE HIMMELRICH

The Daily Press will run a profile of each candidate in the 2018 election.

NAME: SUE HIMMELRICH
AGE: 65
OCCUPATION: ATTORNEY AT WESTERN CENTER ON LAW AND POVERTY
NEIGHBORHOOD OF RESIDENCE: NOMA
OWN OR RENT: OWNED SINCE 1992
MARITAL STATUS/KIDS: MARRIED TO MICHAEL SOLOFF WITH TWO DAUGHTERS, HILARY (28) AND MOLLY (25)
PARTY AFFILIATION: DEMOCRAT SINCE I REGISTERED TO VOTE IN 1971

WHO HAS THE BEST CHEESEBURGER IN SANTA MONICA?

I don't each much meat any longer but The Counter for meat cheeseburgers and Bareburger for veggie cheeseburgers.

WHAT IS THE CITY DOING TO ANCHOR PROMISING STARTUP COMPANIES TO SANTA MONICA AND SECURE LOCAL JOBS?

The City partners with the Chamber of Commerce to promote local companies in emerging industries. This is why we are now the hub of "Silicon Beach" and why newer companies such as Bird and Snap are moving their offices to Santa Monica.

HAVE YOU BEEN THE VICTIM OF A CRIME IN SANTA MONICA IN THE PAST TWO

SEE **HIMMELRICH** PAGE 3

City Hall picks highest renewable option for new power provider

MADELEINE PAUKER
Daily Press Staff Writer

Santa Monicans could soon receive 100 percent of their electricity from renewable sources following an Oct. 23 Council decision to set default options at maximum sustainability.

By February, residents will be enrolled in a new electricity system and receive 100 percent of

SEE **PROVIDER** PAGE 7

Uller investigation expands with additional victims

MATTHEW HALL
Daily Press Editor

Six additional victims have come forward to accuse Eric Uller of child molestation bringing the total victim count to 10.

Uller is currently facing six felony charges related to the original accusations that he

SEE **ULLER** PAGE 3

6th Annual Zombie Crawl set to haunt Santa Monica streets







File Photos

ZOMBIE: The annual Zombie Crawl will shamble through Santa Monica bars and restaurants this Saturday, October 27.

ANGEL CARRERAS
Daily Press Staff Writer

Zombies, ghouls and freaks in costumes will soon run amok in the streets this weekend. As one of these monsters lurch towards you, will you become the hunter or the hunted? While this may sound a bit nerve-wracking, fortunately for Santa Monicans, this scenario will play out in a much less terrifying way.

The Sixth Annual Zombie Crawl returns to Santa Monica this Saturday, a costumed pub crawl in which participants roam downtown as zombies or victims between eight downtown restaurants and bars.

"We thought it would be a fun twist on a regular Halloween pub crawl," Kim Koury, founder of the event said. "We did it as an experiment to see how many people would come … We had over 900 people the first year."

Event goers can choose to be either a

SEE **ZOMBIE** PAGE 6

Isabel A. Ash Esq.
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... Betty, Santa Monica client

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SMMUSD
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smmusd.org

Santa Monica Malibu Unified School District of Los Angeles County (SMMUSD) Inviting Bids

Santa Monica Malibu Unified School District of Los Angeles County (SMMUSD) will receive sealed proposals from contractors holding a type **"B"** license, on the following: **RFQ #19.10.ES.R1 - DSA#03-118810, Santa Monica High School – Discovery Building Lease-leaseback (LLB) Project at Santa Monica High School which includes a Project Labor Agreement (PLA) in accordance with Education Code section 17407.5**. This scope of work is **estimated to be between $110,000,000 - $120,000,000** and includes site grading, construction of a new building, construction of a pool, and landscape and hardscape constituting approximately 265,000 square feet of improvements. The construction will include subterranean parking, surface parking, road construction, various utilities, a distribution center, approximately 28 classrooms, an aquatic center including a 50-meter pool, rooftop solar, rooftop learning areas, commissary kitchen, cafeteria, special education suites, computer labs, commons, administrative spaces, various appurtenant spaces, exterior improvements and other associated improvements per bidding documents. All proposals must be submitted to the SMMUSD Facility Improvement Office, 2828 4th Street, Santa Monica, California 90405 on or before 11/28/18 no later than 3:00 PM. Each proposal must be sealed and marked with the RFQ name and number. All interested firms must attend the Mandatory Pre-Response meeting to be held at the SMMUSD FIP Office on 11/7/18 at 9:00 AM. All General Contractors and Mechanical, Electrical and Plumping (M/E/P) Subcontractors must be pre-qualified for this project per bidding documents. To view the projects bidding documents, please visit ARC Southern California public plan room www.crplanwell.com and reference the project RFQ #.

Prequalification Due Date & Instructions for Application Submission:
All applications are due no later than 11/10/18 - Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District has contracted with Colbi Technologies, Inc. to provide a web-based process for prequalification called QualityBidders. To submit an application at no cost please visit www.qualitybidders.com. Once you have been approved, you will receive an email indicating your approval expiration date and limit. The Districts approved contractors listing can be obtained via the FIP website at http://fipcontractors.smmusd.org/fip-office-website.aspx.

Mandatory Pre-Response Meeting (attendance is required for all Prime Contractors):
Wednesday, 11/7/18 at 9:00 AM

Pre-Response Meeting location:
SMMUSD FIP Office – 2828 4th Street, Santa Monica, CA 90405

Submittal Due Date:
Wednesday, 11/28/18 no later than 3:00 PM

Any further questions or clarifications to this bidding opportunity, please contact Sheere Bishop at smbishop@smmusd.org directly. In addition, any pre-qualification support issues relative to Colbi Technologies, Inc., website or for technical support please contact support@qualityBidders.com directly.

Healthy Lunches for Seniors!

WISE Diner

For information call:
(310) 394-9871

WISE & Healthy Aging offers a weekday lunch program for Santa Monica residents age 60 and older. Your trusted community source for a nutritious meal.

Registration Required!

Locations: Ken Edwards Center & Reed Park in Santa Monica

What's Up Westside

OUT AND ABOUT IN SANTA MONICA

Friday, Oct. 26

Halloweek Family Film: The Nightmare Before Christmas

No Halloweek would be complete without Jack Skellington and the tricks and treats of his crew! [Rated PG/ 76min] 3:45 - 5:15 p.m. Main Library, 601 Santa Monica Blvd.

Saturday, Oct. 27

Song, Dance and Story for all with Aparna Sindhoor

Aparna Sindhoor, her students and company members lead you this workshop is designed for people from different walks of life trying to find their creative voice and express their inner artist. Free. Register at https://apm.activecommunities.com/santamonicarecreation/Activity_Search/68217 or call (310) 458-2239. 1450 Ocean. 2 - 3 p.m.

Cyber Security Awareness Seminar

The Women's Society of Cyberjutsu (WSC) shares knowledge of basic security practices, including creating strong passwords, securing your digital devices, keeping your information private, and other powerful practices. Choose an hour-long session: 11 a.m., 12:30 p.m., or 2 p.m. Main Library, 601 Santa Monica Blvd.

A Reading Celebration of the SM Review

Join the editor and founder of one of the West Coast's leading literary journals for an afternoon of short readings by three of its most beloved frequent contributors: Rhoda Huffey, Brian Ingram, and Lisa Alvarez. Published twice yearly, Santa Monica Review is a project of Santa Monica College and is distributed nationally. Montana Avenue Branch Library, 1704 Montana Ave, 2 - 3:30 p.m.

Spooks & Spoofs

2 p.m. - "Spooks & Spoofs," adaptive, dramatic readings of six classic short stories by film and TV actor, Arnold Weiss, at the Kaufman Brentwood Branch Library, 11820 San Vicente Boulevard. 310-575-8273

Sunday, Oct. 28

Guest House

Free tours begin at 11 a.m., 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. No reservations needed. 415 PCH.

HOWLoween on Main Street!

Sponsored by Paws and Whiskers Pet Spa, furry friends and humans are invited to participate in a costume contest with local vendors, food truck, pet friendly exhibitors and raffle opportunities with prizes from Main Street restaurants & retailers. 2 p.m. mixer, 4 p.m. costume contest, 5 p.m. raffle, 5:30 costume winners, 6 - 7 p.m. after party at Ashland Hill. Pacific Street Dog Park, Pacific and Main.

Monday, Oct. 29

Affording College

Diana Hanson of Magellan College Counseling talks about the importance of merit aid, scholarships, and selecting a college that's both a good fit and a good value. Grades 9 - 12. Main Library, 601 Santa Monica Blvd. 7 - 8 p.m.

Movie Screening: Coco

Aspiring musician Miguel, confronted with his family's ancestral ban on music, enters the Land of the Dead to find his great-great-grandfather, a legendary singer. (105 min.) Pico Branch Library, 2201 Pico Blvd, 6:30 - 8:15 p.m.

Halloween Games and Crafts

Ready for some spooky fun on the front lawn?! Come in costume for Halloween games, prizes and crafts! Ocean Park Branch Library, 2601 Main St, 3:30 - 4:30 p.m.

L.E.A.R.N.: Learn, Excel, Achieve and Read Now

One-on-one access to volunteers available to help students with homework assignments and reading comprehension. Mondays and Wednesdays. Main Library, 601 Santa Monica Blvd. 3:30 - 6 p.m.

For help submitting an event, contact us at
310-458-7737 or submit to events@smdp.com

ULLER

FROM PAGE 1

assaulted four male victims in the 1990's while a volunteer with the Police Activities League (PAL). City Hall released a statement Thursday saying that in addition to the new victims, the investigation timeline now runs from 1986 to 2010.

The Los Angeles Sheriff's Department arrested Uller on Oct. 18 after the Santa Monica Police Department requested the aid of the Sheriff's Special Victims Bureau. At his first court date on Oct. 22, the District Attorney filed three counts of lewd acts with a child, two counts of oral copulation with a person under 18 and one count of continuous sexual abuse. His bail was also reduced from $2 million to $750,000.

Residents and community leaders have said Uller's conduct was an open secret in the Pico neighborhood and accused officials of turning a blind eye to complaints.

Officials have acknowledged the concern over past complaints and promised a transparent investigation into the concerns.

"The City has retained Irma Rodríguez Moises and Gabriel Sandoval at the law firm of Atkinson, Andelson, Loya, Ruud & Romo to conduct an independent investigation of allegations that the City previously knew, or should have known, of Mr. Uller's alleged criminal conduct," said a statement issued by City Hall on Oct. 25. "The investigation will also review whether the City had in place sufficient procedures to encourage reporting of such conduct, and to ensure that reports are acted on."

The statement said there is an active review into current youth programs to ensure the reporting policies in place meet best practices.

"The City has identified that Mr. Uller was an instructor in the City's Youth Tech Program, a summer program preparing high school students for careers in the tech industry that ran from 2012 to 2017," said the statement. "This morning, the City reached out to all families whose children participated in this program to inform them of the arrest and criminal charges and to share contact information for the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department should they be aware of any facts that may be relevant to the criminal investigation."

In addition, the school district's Mental Health Coordinator has been contacted to provide care to students, parents, caregivers or school staff who have concerns. Additional mental health services are also available at PAL, CREST, and VAP participants and their families.

Schoolboard member and director of the Pico Youth and Family Center Oscar de la Torre has said he raised warnings about Uller in the past. De la Torre will host a community meeting about the case on Oct. 30 at Virginia Ave Park from 7 - 9 p.m.

The City continues to urge anyone who has information that may be relevant to the criminal investigation to contact the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, Special Victims Bureau, at (877) 710-5273 or by email at specialvictimsbureau@lasd.org.

editor@smdp.com

HIMMELRICH

FROM PAGE 1

YEARS AND WHAT HAPPENED?

I have not been a victim of crime, but did send the Daily Press an open letter reacting to a string of robberies in my neighborhood http://www.smdp.com/an-open-letter-to-the-knock-knock-and-flocking-thieves-in-santa-monica/161190

WHAT SANTA MONICA SERVICE OR PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS DO YOU BELONG TO? HOW MANY HOURS PER WEEK DO YOU VOLUNTEER INSIDE SANTA MONICA?

Santa Monicans for Renters Rights, Santa Monica Democratic Club, Santa Monica Bar Association, Santa Monica Homelessness Task Force, NOMA, Wilmont, FOSP, Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce, Heal the Bay, Santa Monica Transparency Project. Not counting City Council, which occupies 20-30 hours per week, I spend 10 or more additional hours per week volunteering in Santa Monica.

DO YOU HAVE AN ACCOUNT WITH BIRD, LIME, JUMP, LYFT, UBER AND/OR BREEZE FOR SCOOTERS AND BIKES? WHICH ONE DO YOU USE MOST FREQUENTLY?

I have accounts with Bird, Lime, Lyft, and Breeze. I have not been able to connect successfully with Jump though I have tried. I use Breeze most frequently but generally prefer to walk shorter distances.

WHAT, IF ANY, IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN CRIME AND HOMELESSNESS?

We criminalize homelessness in many ways: by banning loitering, panhandling, occupying and sleeping in public places, and creating shelter. Thus begins the vicious cycle of homelessness – not a lifestyle choice for most – and arrest, leading to a criminal record, which in turn leads to more barriers to finding a job or housing.

WHICH THREE LOCAL BUSINESSES KNOW YOU BY NAME?

Casa Martin, Upper West, Salon Nesou

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THE CITY'S TRAFFIC MITIGATION EFFORTS IF BBB IS CONSIDERING REPLACING BUSES WITH CARS ON SOME ROUTES?

If a route cannot support a bus but is necessary for legal or other reasons, it makes perfect sense to provide service with a smaller vehicle, e.g., a car. This already is the case with paratransit. BBB has sought public input on broader microtransit but has not taken steps toward implementation.

HOW WILL THE CITY'S ECONOMY SURVIVE THE CONTINUED DECLINE IN RETAIL SALES?

The City – and all cities – will need to find new sources of income from the businesses and technologies that replace brick-and-mortar retail. This includes online merchants of all sorts that have monetized internet and wireless technology.

SEVERAL DOWNTOWN PROJECTS (THE FAIRMONT, THE GEHRY PROJECT AND 4TH/5TH AND ARIZONA) ARE STILL WORKING THROUGH THE CITY PROCESS. WHAT DOES THE FINAL BUILDOUT OF DOWNTOWN LOOK LIKE?

I remain opposed to creating office space on our public land at 4th/5th and Arizona. I believe that all parking (and all revenues from that parking) from all three projects should be built at 4th/5th and Arizona, with all parking revenues going to the City. I am unhappy with the 130 ft. height levels the council adopted for Ocean Ave. as well as 4th/5th and Arizona and would prefer that maximum heights for these sites be reduced to 84 ft.

WERE THE CHANGES TO THE PIER CONCERTS A POSITIVE FOR THE SHOWS, THE PIER AND THE COMMUNITY?

The pier concerts swung from the Khalid extreme to this year's light attendance. I'm sure the Pier will continue to find a middle ground that allows the concerts to remain interesting without turning into Woodstock West.

HOW DO YOU DEFINE PROGRESS FOR A COMMUNITY LIKE SANTA MONICA?

Progress means: our residents feeling increasingly secure in their homes, both from crime and from displacement; protecting and enhancing our diversity, especially economic diversity; developing new affordable housing and assisting more rent burdened seniors; reducing the number of homeless on our streets but doing it the right way, by placing the homeless in housing, providing necessary services, and working with other communities to do the same; reducing traffic congestions and attracting both residents, workers, visitors, and others to use transit or other modes rather than drive; closing the achievement gap in our schools; progress is offering to our community members a broader and more compelling cultural and artistic experience.

SANTA MONICA RESIDENTS FEEL BESIEGED HOMELESSNESS AND MANY ARE TIRED OF BEING TOLD SOLUTIONS ARE COMING OR NEED TO BE AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL. WHAT WILL YOU DO FROM THE COUNCIL DAIS TO DIRECTLY IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR CITIZENS CONCERNED ABOUT THIS ISSUE?

As legal counsel for the Western Center on Law and Poverty I work on issues advocating for low income and homeless communities. In Santa Monica I serve on the city's Homeless Task Force where we seek solutions to address the specific needs of those without housing as well as protecting those who are on the margins of becoming homeless while assessing as well how we best ensure the safety of all and be an effective participant in regional efforts.

People may grow tired of hearing that the challenge of homelessness requires a regional effort. Nevertheless, this is a truth about which we must always be reminded and Santa Monica must help lead that effort.

In terms of solutions, I believe that this regional problem requires a regional Housing First approach. Such an approach was successful in reducing the homeless population in Utah by 92%. We must also provide a system that expedites housing placement under a Housing First program for those who are chronically homeless in Santa Monica. We must create permanent supportive housing designed specifically to meet the needs of our homeless community, whether that be housing vouchers or project-based section 8 units. We must also address the rights and protections for those residing in and seeking services from our shelters. I am assessing a solution to move one of our shelters into a larger, more accessible building to increase capacity as well as improve the experience of our homeless population in the shelter system.

We currently have outreach teams working with our homeless residents in parks and on our streets to assess their needs and address policy changes that can help move people into housing and services quickly. I have been participating in the City's homeless count for years and have also been an active member of the volunteerism section of the Task Force. I pushed for more rapid implementation of outreach efforts.

I am now moving to the public safety section of the Task Force where I hope to motivate efforts that will address the fears of community members. I have pushed staff to consider moving Samoshel, our medical shelter, to a hanger in the airport and believe that many services could be shifted from downtown to our airport properties with traffic mitigation provided by shuttle service.

At last week's Coast event, I manned the Homelessness table for the "We Are Santa Monica" booth and was moved by the willingness of so many participants to open their hearts to our efforts concerning our homeless population. Only one person over a 4-hour shift suggested that we should jail or institutionalize the homeless in Santa Monica. Others, many with small children, wanted to know more about preparing hygiene kits, donating to the Westside Food Bank, and planning a "service day" at their work or their children's school. Most heartening was the willingness of a clear majority of participants to say "hello" to someone whom they perceived as homeless, a practice I have adopted that patently has a positive effect.

As we all know, though, the best solution to homelessness is affordable housing, and I plan to continue my determined efforts to increase the supply of affordable housing in Santa Monica both because it is needed here but also because we provide and important regional model. I worked for the repeal of Costa Hawkins (and the Ellis Act) long before Prop 10 was placed on the ballot. Much of my advocacy has focused on funding and creating affordable housing. With my husband, I sponsored and helped fund campaigns for Measures GS and GSH with school district parent associations. These measures passed with over 62% of the vote and now provide $8.5 million each for affordable housing and public schools. I also supported the requirement of 20-30% affordable housing in the Downtown Community Plan.

We also must prevent people at risk of losing their housing from eviction. We have many elderly residents who are long-term rent control tenants, and I support the POD program that provides subsidies to long-term tenants paying more than 50% of their income for rent, which now is funded at an annual level of $2 million. I also initiated legislation that prohibits discrimination against Section 8 tenants, and an ordinance banning evictions of students and teachers during the school year.

Finally, to add additional funds to our local affordable housing efforts, I will promote a tax on market rate units, rent-controlled or not, to generate additional funds for affordable housing, preservation of existing housing, and helping our residents to stay in their homes.

We know the police department needs to hire more people and state laws have put more criminals back on the streets but what will you do to at the local level mitigate the increase in crime?

I am aware and councilmembers are aware of the increase in crime. As councilmembers, public safety in the broadest sense is our #1 responsibility, so this continued increase is simply unacceptable. I have spoken at great length with our police chiefs, old and new, and our city manager; we have authorized funding for additional sworn and unsworn police officers; and I have stressed and will continue to stress the need for a police presence on the streets in the areas where the violence is concentrated. I note with some pride that it was the Santa Monica police whose quick response resulted in the recent arrest of an alleged serial murderer.

Our police are well trained to help both the housed and the homeless. The risks of crime are far greater for those without homes. I believe a community policing model, including foot patrol in our parks and areas where the homeless congregate, is more likely to be an effective deterrent to crime than scheduled police cruisers driving by.

Prevention of crime must be our #1 priority. We need to improve community awareness of how we can avoid becoming victims and ensure continued rapid police response to violent incidents.

I think it is imperative that we as council members acknowledge the truth of unpleasant conditions, such as rising crime and homelessness, inform ourselves about solutions that were effective in other cities, and implement those solutions.

I am fortunate that my day job at Western Center on Law & Poverty informs my insight into solutions to our thorny problems. I will continue to apply what I learn from that job to improve the life of all Santa Monicans.

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Even When They're Happy, They're Mad

Even in progressive Santa Monica, these are not great times for journalists. However, I'd like to share two hopefully amusing examples. The first involves someone who doesn't know me and the second is about someone who does. (And probably dislikes me more than the first guy.)

Over a year ago, my editor informed me that, during the weekend, there were 6 voicemails that weren't exactly sending kudos my way. Tentatively, he asked if I wanted to hear them. "How bad can they be?" I said naively.

The caller, a devout Trump supporter, might have felt right at home carrying a Tiki torch in Charleston. I say that because his comments included, "Hitler didn't finish the job," and "Jews think they know everything." (On the bright side, he didn't say I wasn't funny.)

Though hardly an excuse, the caller was "slurring his words" drunk. That said, listening to his hate-filled voice was eerie. As my concerns grew, I decided to call the police. They graciously listened but concluded the voicemails didn't constitute "a terrorist threat."

They also didn't have the authority to contact the caller to "discourage" him from further calls. After they left, and since I had the number from caller I.D., I decided to phone the caller directly. (Not smart, Jack.)

Thankfully, I got his voice mail and, to my amazement, on his outgoing message he was also drunk! "Leave a message or don't, I could give a sh*t," he slurred. (For his sake, I hope he's found an AA meeting nearby.)

The second Trump supporter livid with me is a friend of a friend and shall remain nameless. With empathy, I add that he is legally blind and carries a long walking stick to navigate his morning trip to Starbucks. (I'm not thrilled he delights in calling Democrats, "Demorats" and maybe he won't be either when his Social Security gets reduced to offset tax breaks for billionaires.)

At Starbucks on this particular day, I probably shouldn't have stopped to say hello but I did. (No good deed goes unpunished?) But, to my pleasant surprise, he volunteered that he didn't hold my columns against me. Wow!

I replied eagerly, "Let's just agree to disagree, okay?" Somehow, this set him off, or something did because within seconds he was shouting, "You belong in prison with that b**ch Hillary!" (I started to get the feeling he didn't like Hillary.)

His anger boiling over, he began waving his walking stick to punctuate his arguments. (And maybe knock my head off?) Meanwhile, two 20-something women, who apparently just finished shopping on Main Street, were walking in our direction.

The two were happily chatting until they saw us. I could swear, as they passed, they gave me the evil eye as if to say, "Why are you harassing that poor, old blind man?" (Hey, how about the poor, old columnist?)

Carefully out of walking-stick range, I got up to leave. "Take care," I said feigning cheerfulness and split as fast as my feet could carry me.

And now for the horrific elephant in the room. (No pun intended.) I'm referring to the 10 pipe bomb assassination attempts so far. It's just a fact, every one of those targeted has criticized Trump.

With 11 days until the midterms, tragically Trump couldn't bring himself to try to unite the country. As he didn't at his Inaugural or even after the Kavanaugh vote. He joked at his rally that he was "behaving." That's something a 6-year-old might say, not the Commander in Chief.

Inflaming his supporters in recent rallies Trump calls Democrats "evil" and "crazy." (Projection anyone?) Tone-deaf in the light of the brutal murder of a Washington Post columnist, Trump lavished praise on a GOP Congressman who, in 2017, was convicted of a violent assault on a reporter. He infamously body slammed the man but later admitted he'd been asking a legitimate question. And yet Trump boasted about the Congressman, "He's my kind of guy."

At his rallies, Trump blatantly repeats lies i.e. "The migrant caravan includes Middle Easterners." (With swords in their teeth to cut our throats?) And suddenly he's calling himself a "nationalist," without seeming to know its dark history.

In 1930's Germany, a failed artist was also a "nationalist." He too railed at the press and fueled supporters' rage by scapegoating "others." As he catapulted the planet into WW2, he proved the bigger the lie the more it's believed. (Sound familiar?)

We are in a terrorist attack state. But, rather than comforting the country, Trump tweets insults. I know Trumpists are going to be more unhappy with me than ever. I just hope I've made the other 54% mad enough to go vote.

Lastly, when the FBI catches the psycho who mailed the bombs, I can assure you one thing. He won't be wearing a Hillary hat.

Jack is at: facebook.com/jackneworth, twitter.com/jackneworth and jackdailypress@aol.com

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WINNER

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 to the Editor can be submitted to letters@smdp.com. Receipt of a letter does not guarantee publication and all content is published at the discretion of the paper. All letters and guest editorials are subject to editing for space and content. All submissions must include the author's name, address and phone number for the purposes of verification.

Water out of thin air: California couple's device wins $1.5M

JOHN ROGERS
Associated Press

It started out modestly enough: David Hertz, having learned that under the right conditions you really can make your own water out of thin air, put a little contraption on the roof of his office and began cranking out free bottles of H2O for anyone who wanted one.

Soon he and his wife, Laura Doss-Hertz, were thinking bigger — so much so that this week the couple won the $1.5 million XPrize For Water Abundance. They prevailed by developing a system that uses shipping containers, wood chips and other detritus to produce as much as 528 gallons (2,000 liters) of water a day at a cost of no more than 2 cents a quart (1 liter).

The XPrize competition, created by a group of philanthropists, entrepreneurs and others, has awarded more than $140 million over the years for what it calls audacious, futuristic ideas aimed at protecting and improving the planet. The first XPrize, for $10 million, went to Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen and aviation pioneer Burt Rutan in 2004 for SpaceShipOne, the first privately financed manned space flight.

When Hertz learned a couple of years ago that a prize was about to be offered to whoever could come up with a cheap, innovative way to produce clean freshwater for a world that doesn't have enough of it, he decided to go all in.

At the time, his little water-making machine was cranking out 150 gallons a day, much of which was being given to homeless people living in and around the alley behind the Studio of Environmental Architecture, Hertz's Venice Beach-area firm that specializes in creating green buildings.

He and his wife, a commercial photographer, and their partner Richard Groden, who created the smaller machine, assembled The Skysource/Skywater Alliance and went to work. They settled on creating little rainstorms inside shipping containers by heating up wood chips to produce the temperature and humidity needed to draw water from the air and the wood itself.

"One of the fascinating things about shipping containers is that more are imported than exported, so there's generally a surplus," said Hertz, adding they're cheap and easy to move around.

And if there's no wood chips around for heat, coconut husks, rice, walnut shells, grass clippings or just about any other such waste product will do just fine.

"Certainly in regions where you have a lot of biomass, this is going to be a very simple technology to deploy," said Matthew Stuber, a professor of chemical and biomolecular engineering at the University of Connecticut and expert on water systems who was one of the panel's judges.

He called their water-making machine a "really cool" merging of rather simple technologies that can be used to quickly deliver water to regions hit by natural disasters, stricken by drought or even rural areas with a shortage of clean water.

Hertz and Doss-Hertz are just starting to contemplate how to accomplish that.

Theirs was among 98 teams from 27 countries who entered the competition. Many teams were bigger and better funded, while the couple mortgaged their Malibu home to stay in the game. At one point, they were told they hadn't made the final round of five, but one team dropped out and they were back in.

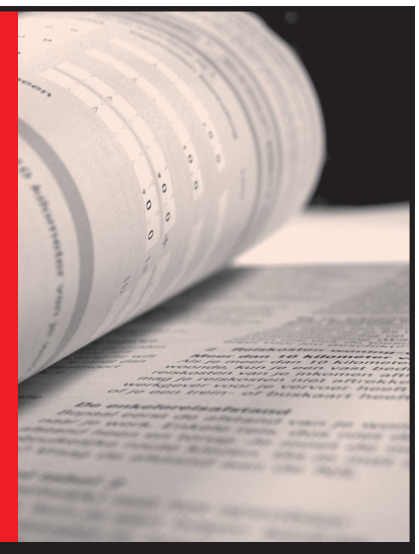
"If you say we were the dark horse in the race, we weren't even in the race," Hertz recalled, smiling.

He stood near a giant copy of the check in his office while Doss-Hertz prepared to leave for a photo shoot and a visitor sampled a glass of their freshly made water.

Now, though, they are in for the long, wet haul.

"There's no restrictions whatsoever on how it's used," Hertz said of the prize money. "But Laura and I have committed to using it all for the development and deployment of these machines, to get them to people who need the water most."

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ZOMBIE

FROM PAGE 1

victim or zombie, with zombie-choosers given free makeup applied to them to look the part as well as act the part, being required to lurch around with arms extended while moaning and groaning in tattered clothes.

It's a sight that may initially seem startling but has ultimately been a boon to local business.

Ye Olde King's Head, one of the yearly participants of the event, enjoys the zombie-filled relationship.

"It's a surreal thing to see," Lisa Powers, Ye Olde King's Head operations manager said. She said the event typically brings in over at least 100+ unique visitors from the event. And, you know, some funny looks. "You can imagine if you're a tourist visiting, it might be a bit of an interesting sight to see."

This year's event will add a game-like element with participants plotting against each other to search for search for wristbands throughout the crawl. The first three groups that are able to get five wristbands will get a free drink at the event's afterparty.

A Santa Monica Police Department says while a bunch of potentially drunk zombies might sound more terrifying than the real thing, locals shouldn't worry as the police department has an increased presence downtown during events such as this.

"Anytime you have alcohol and young folks involved, we try to add as much security and safety as possible," Saul Rodriguez, SMPD's public information officer said. "We recommend using shared driving services such as Uber, Lyft, and taxis. Just don't overdrink."

Koury lauds the event as a fun and immersive community event that you won't regret going to over something like a house party.

"You don't have to go through all the hassle of finding a costume. Just show up and have a good time."

The 6th Annual Zombie Crawl takes place Saturday, October 27, 6 p.m. - 2 a.m. Tickets are $12 in advance and $15 day of. For more information, visit https://zombiecrawl2018.eventbrite.com

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PROVIDER

FROM PAGE 1

their household electricity from renewable resources such as wind or solar, unless they choose to opt down to 50 or 36 percent or out of the program entirely. Customers will be able to opt down, up, out, or back in at any time.

According to city staff, electricity use is about 19 percent of Santa Monica's total greenhouse gas emissions and reducing those emissions is a significant part of the broader efforts to achieve carbon neutrality.

If every Santa Monica household opted for 100 percent renewable energy, the city's total emissions would be 35 percent lower than they were in 1990, said City analyst Garrett Wong. Initial estimates project a rate increase of between 7 - 9 percent for the default choice.

In that scenario, he said, the average customer will see about a $6 increase from their Southern California Edison bill, and low-income qualified customers will see no increase in costs at all.

"This is the most significant action people can take with the least amount of inconvenience," Wong said.

Council voted in December 2017 to become a member of the Clean Power Alliance (CPA), an electricity provider for communities across Los Angeles and Ventura counties, and set a 100 percent renewable energy tier for municipal and commercial accounts in February. CPA requires its members to select default options for renewable energy rates.

The new agency will source its electricity from renewable sources and use Edison's existing power lines to reach customers.

Residents who have installed solar panels will also receive more money for the excess electricity they generate, Wong said. CPA's buy back rate for electricity is about six cents per kilowatt hour, compared to SCE's rate of two to three cents.

Starting in December, CPA will send every customer four informational mailers about the program, which will include estimated electricity costs. Staff will also conduct outreach through blogs, newsletters, social media, and in-person presentations.

Other communities with a 100 percent default option include Culver City, West Hollywood, South Pasadena, San Buenaventura, Ojai, Rolling Hills Estates, and Ventura County.

Santa Monica has approximately 48,000 residential customers and 8,300 commercial customers.

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NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING BEFORE THE SANTA MONICA CITY COUNCIL

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that on Tuesday, November 13, 2018, a public hearing as required by Section 147(f) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 will be held with respect to a proposed plan of financing providing for the issuance by the California Municipal Finance Authority (the "Authority") of its revenue bonds in one or more series issued from time to time, including bonds issued to refund such revenue bonds in one or more series from time to time, in an amount not to exceed $15,000,000 (the "Bonds"). The proceeds of the Bonds will be used to: (1) finance or refinance the acquisition, rehabilitation, improvement and equipping of Step Up On Second Apartments, a 36-unit multifamily rental housing project located at 1328 2nd Street, Santa Monica, California; and (2) pay certain expenses incurred in connection with the issuance of the Bonds. The facilities are to be owned by Step Up On Second Preservation, L.P. (the "Borrower") or a partnership created by BlueGreen Preservation & Development, LLC (the "Developer"), consisting at least of the Developer or a related person to the Developer and one or more limited partners and operated by Step Up.

The Bonds and the obligation to pay principal of and interest thereon and any redemption premium with respect thereto do not constitute indebtedness or an obligation of the Authority, the State of California or any political subdivision thereof, within the meaning of any constitutional or statutory debt limitation, or a charge against the general credit or taxing powers of any of them. The Bonds shall be a limited obligation of the Authority, payable solely from certain revenues duly pledged therefor and generally representing amounts paid by the Borrower.

The hearing will commence at 5:30 p.m. or as soon thereafter as the matter can be heard, and will be held in the City Council Chambers, 1685 Main Street, Room 213, Santa Monica, California. Interested persons wishing to express their views on the issuance of the Bonds or on the nature and location of the facilities proposed to be financed or refinanced may attend the public hearing or, prior to the time of the hearing, submit written comments.

Additional information concerning the above matter may be obtained from, and written comments should be addressed to, City Clerk, City of Santa Monica, 1685 Main Street, Room 102, PO Box 2200, Santa Monica, California 90401.

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SURF FORECASTS

WATER TEMP: 64.8°

FRIDAY - **FAIR** - SURF: 2-3 ft waist to stomach high occ. 4 ft
SSW swell down a notch. Reinforcing WNW/NW swell. Peaky shape at combo beach-breaks.

SATURDAY - **FAIR** - SURF: 2-3 ft knee to waist high occ. 4 ft
SSW swell eases as new, long period SW swell slowly builds. WNW/NW swell tops out.
Peaky shape at combo beach-breaks.

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CRIME WATCH

BY DAILY PRESS STAFF

Crime Watch is culled from reports provided by the Santa Monica Police Department. These are arrests only. All parties are innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

ON OCTOBER 10, AT ABOUT 8:25 A.M.

Officers responded to the Shore Hotel at 1515 Ocean Avenue regarding a fraud. Upon arrival, officers spoke with hotel staff. Officers learned a male subject was using several fraudulent cards and a fake identity during his stay at the hotel. The subject had charged over $1725 to a card under the name of another person. The subject was found to be in possession of nine various credit cards and bank cards under various names other than his. The subject was taken into custody. Alex Michael Hayes, 23, from Campbell, was arrested for commercial burglary, possession of access cards with intent to commit fraud and unauthorized use of personal information. Bail was set at $20,000.

DAILY POLICE LOG

The Santa Monica Police Department Responded To 363 Calls For Service On Oct. 24.

HERE IS A SAMPLING OF THOSE CALLS CHOSEN BY THE SANTA MONICA DAILY PRESS STAFF.

Drunk driving 5th / Colorado 12:27 a.m.
Traffic collision Berkeley / Santa Monica 12:59 a.m.
Drunk driving 900 block 6th 3:14 a.m.
Encampment 2000 block the beach 5:45 a.m.
Encampment Cloverfield / Interstate 10 6:47 a.m. 7:17 a.m.
Petty theft 300 block Santa Monica Pier 7:33 a.m.
Strongarm robbery 300 block Santa Monica Pier 7:33 a.m.
Encampment 1800 block the beach 7:35 a.m.
Encampment 1400 block the beach 8:21 a.m.
Battery 10th / Wilshire 8:36 a.m.
Traffic collision 2200 block Colorado 8:43 a.m.
Vehicle parked in alley 1000 block 14th 8:50 a.m.
Encampment 1000 block the beach 9:10 a.m.
Grand theft 400 block Wilshire 9:25 a.m.
Petty theft 11th / Colorado 9:29 a.m.
Battery 1500 block Olympic 9:58 a.m.
Fight 1600 block the beach 10:07 a.m.
Extortion 2400 block 25th 10:18 a.m.
Fraud 1200 block Santa Monica 10:48 a.m.
Vehicle parked in alley 2600 block Ocean Park 10:49 a.m.
Indecent exposure Ocean / Arizona 10:49 a.m.
Petty theft 1500 block Broadway 11:31 a.m.
Burglary 1700 block Ashland 11:51 a.m.
Battery 1200 block 10th 11:54 a.m.
Hit and run 2000 block Wilshire 11:55 a.m.
Petty theft 2600 block Lincoln 12:19 p.m.
Fight 6th / Broadway 12:33 p.m.
Petty theft 1300 block Wilshire 12:52 p.m.
Burglary 1400 block 14th 1:07 p.m.
Theft recyclables 600 block San Vicente 1:11 p.m.
Stakeout 2900 block Ocean Park 1:21 p.m.
Petty theft 700 block Broadway 1:43 p.m.
Person down 1100 block 17th 1:53 p.m.
Theft suspect 1300 block Wilshire 2:33 p.m.
Threats 2600 block Montana 2:37 p.m.
Petty theft 1400 block Ocean Front Walk 2:45 p.m.
Petty theft 300 block Santa Monica Pier 2:48 p.m.
Hit and run 1100 block 11th 3:03 p.m.
Traffic collision 1100 block 11th 3:09 p.m.
Assault w/deadly weapon Ocean / Bay 3:16 p.m.
Encampment Olympic / Centinela 3:25 p.m.
Fight Lincoln / Broadway 3:49 p.m.
Elder abuse 1400 block 17th 3:56 p.m.
Person with a gun 1600 block Ocean Front Walk 3:56 p.m.
Petty theft 1400 block 2nd 4:02 p.m.
Illegal weapon 1600 block 11th 4:16 p.m.
Grand theft 1700 block Cloverfield 4:37 p.m.
Burglary 2000 block Euclid 4:40 p.m.
Identity theft 1100 block Yale 4:43 p.m.
Person with a gun 1300 block 2nd 4:51 p.m.
Traffic collision 25th / Ocean Park 5:32 p.m.
Pedestrian stop 1100 block Lincoln 5:38 p.m.
Petty theft 1200 block 3rd Street Prom 5:47 p.m.
Hit and run 900 block Centinela 5:51 p.m.
Encampment 1700 block Dewey 5:57 p.m.
Identity theft 1400 block Hill 6:02 p.m.
Found property 31st / Ocean Park 6:02 p.m.
Battery 500 block Santa Monica 6:40 p.m.
Theft suspect in custody 1300 block Wilshire 7:02 p.m.
Theft suspect in custody 1300 block Wilshire 7:39 p.m.
Battery 200 block Santa Monica Pier 7:54 p.m.
Drunk driving 5th / Colorado 8:12 p.m.
Encampment 1200 block 19th 8:16 p.m.

DAILY FIRE LOG

The Santa Monica Fire Department Responded To 27 Calls For Service On Oct. 24.

HERE IS A SAMPLING OF THOSE CALLS CHOSEN BY THE SANTA MONICA DAILY PRESS STAFF.

Emergency Medical Service Berkeley/Santa Monica 1:02 a.m.
EMS 1200 Block Ashland 5:40 a.m.
Odor Natural Gas 2200 Block Colorado 6:01 a.m.
Trash/Dumpster Fire Cloverfield / Pico 7:38 a.m.
EMS 2800 Block Virginia 8:38 a.m.
EMS 900 Block 3rd 9:37 a.m.
Elevator Rescue 100 Block California 9:49 a.m.
EMS 2000 Block Arizona 11:18 a.m.
Automatic Alarm 1700 Block 21st 11:47 a.m.
EMS 2000 Block Santa Monica 12:06 p.m.
EMS 1800 Block 10th 12:43 p.m.
EMS 6th / Broadway 12:48 p.m.
EMS 1700 Block Pearl 1:48 p.m.
EMS 1100 Block 17th 1:53 p.m.
EMS 1000 Block 11th 2:11 p.m.
EMS 600 Block Wilshire 2:54 p.m.
Automatic Alarm 700 Block 17th 4:02 p.m.
EMS 2200 Block Lincoln 5:05 p.m.
EMS 500 Block Olympic 5:47 p.m.
EMS 500 Block Pico 6:08 p.m.
EMS 1500 Block 5th 6:29 p.m.
EMS 300 Block Santa Monica Pier 7:01 p.m.
EMS 2100 Block Arizona 7:47 p.m.
Traffic Collision with Injury 5th / Colorado 8:13 p.m.
EMS 3100 Block Pico 9:49 p.m.
Electrical Fire - No Fire Visible 3000 Block Main 11:26 p.m.

DAILY LOTTERY

Powerball
Draw Date: 10/24
3 21 45 53 56
Power#: 22
Jackpot: 750M

Mega Millions
Draw Date: 10/23
5 28 62 65 70
Mega#: 5
Jackpot: 40M

Super Lotto Plus
Draw Date: 10/24
1 2 6 34 44
Mega#: 6
Jackpot: 17M

Fantasy 5
Draw Date: 10/24
17 23 25 30 35

Daily 3
Draw Date: 10/24
MIDDAY: 9 4 6
Draw Date: 10/24
EVENING: 1 5 2

Daily Derby
Draw Date: 10/24
1st: 01 Gold Rush
2nd: 07 Eureka
3rd: 04 Big Ben
RACE TIME: 1:43.95

Although every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the winning number information, mistakes can occur. In the event of any discrepancies, California State laws and California Lottery regulations will prevail. Complete game information and prize claiming instructions are available at California Lottery retailers. Visit the California State Lottery web site at **http://www.calottery.com**

WORD UP!

dirigible
1. an airship.
2. designed for or capable of being directed, controlled, or steered.

WELL NEWS BY SCOTT LAFEE

Observation

■ "Health nuts are going to feel stupid someday, lying in hospitals dying of nothing." -- American comedian Redd Foxx (1922-1991)

Last Words

■ "Why do you weep? Did you think I was immortal?" -- King Louis XIV of France (1638-1715), who died of gangrene after reigning for 72 years. He was succeeded on the throne by his 5-year-old grandson.

Mania of the Week

■ Tomomania: irrational predilection for performing surgery (and who hasn't wanted to cut to the chase?)

MYSTERY PHOTO

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The first person who can correctly identify where this image was captured wins a prize. Send answers to editor@smdp.com.

SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S CROSSWORD

S	C	R	A	P		I	T	C	H		D	A	T	A
P	L	E	B	E		D	R	A	Y		I	R	O	N
R	O	S	E	N	Y	L	U	N	D		S	M	O	G
A	S	U		D	E	E		T	R	A	C	Y		
T	E	M	P		S	C	H	O	O	L		M	P	H
S	T	E	A	M		H	A	N		L	A	U	R	A
			G	E	T	A	T		L	O	L	L	E	D
	V	I	O	L	E	T	C	R	A	W	L	E	Y	
C	A	D	D	I	E		H	E	X	E	S			
I	M	E	A	N		D	E	V		D	E	C	O	R
A	P	E		D	I	E	T	E	D		T	U	N	A
		F	R	A	N	C		N	I	P		S	S	N
A	R	I	A		P	E	T	U	N	I	A	P	I	G
F	O	X	Y		J	I	V	E		E	L	I	T	E
T	O	E	S		S	T	A	R		S	E	D	E	R

Sudoku

Fill in the blank cells using numbers 1 to 9. Each number can appear only once in each row, column, and 3x3 block. Use logic and process of elimination to solve the puzzle.

SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S SUDOKU

2	4	7	9	8	6	5	3	1
8	9	3	1	5	7	6	2	4
1	5	6	4	2	3	7	8	9
6	2	9	8	7	5	4	1	3
4	1	8	6	3	9	2	7	5
7	3	5	2	1	4	8	9	6
3	8	2	5	6	1	9	4	7
9	6	1	7	4	8	3	5	2
5	7	4	3	9	2	1	6	8

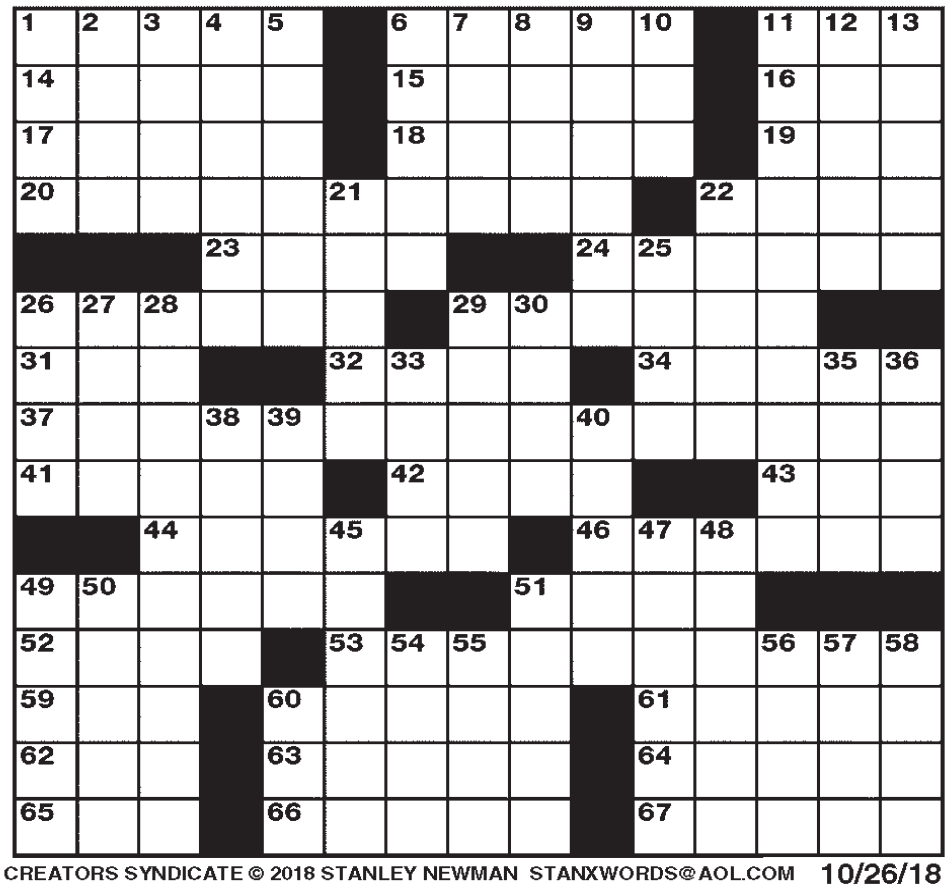
	2		5			6		
9		8			3		7	
3		4			7		5	
	8			9	4			
1				8				2
			2	7			4	
	1		7			4		6
	3		4			7		9
		6			2		8	

Newsday Crossword

WHAT'S A COMMITTEE? by S.N. Edited by Stanley Newman
www.stanxwords.com

ACROSS
1 Heavy reading
6 Deplete one's dollars
11 Small falloff
14 Uniquely
15 Displayed conspicuously
16 What I may stand for
17 Corporate makeover
18 "Play loudly"
19 Tarnish
20 Answer to the title question, part 1
22 "Spill it!"
23 Glacial offshoot
24 In a manner designed to chill
26 Australian swimwear brand
29 Drenched
31 Onetime buyer of *Time*
32 "You said it!"
34 Wisher's best friend
37 Part 2 of answer
41 Oscar presenters' introducer
42 Looking up
43 What Descartes called himself
44 Seismic disturbance
46 Packing quite a punch
49 *The View* name since 2007
51 Pro __ work
52 Impaired
53 End of answer
59 SFO screen stat
60 Clear blue sky
61 Sunlit spaces
62 Stop stalling
63 Melodic
64 Jarring the ear
65 Not just any
66 Bill with Independence Hall
67 Pharmaceutical amounts

DOWN
1 Where *GWTW* begins
2 Designer Cassini
3 Tie up at a dock
4 Dress royally
5 Moved on smoothly
6 Genius begins with it
7 Half a disdainful verb
8 Cornell of Cornell
9 Finished with
10 He established NASA
11 Part of any URL
12 Totaling
13 Perhaps too cheerful
21 Start of some golf tourneys
22 27 Down citing "leafy arms"
25 Periphery
26 Fermented-rice product
27 Recitation at some slams
28 Voting universe
29 __ Frog's (Mexican food chain)
30 Difficult task
33 Picasso contemporary
35 Aiding or abetting
36 Check for 40 Down
38 Tycoon from Texarkana
39 Percolate
40 Keyboarding gone wrong
45 With 51 Down, source of answer
47 In attendance
48 Way overdone
49 Source of gluten
50 Rabbit residence
51 See 45 Down
54 Melodramatic plaint
55 Amphitheater accommodation
56 *Exodus* novelist
57 Ascendancy
58 Is known to have spoken
60 Enumeration abbreviation



CREATORS SYNDICATE © 2018 STANLEY NEWMAN STANXWORDS@AOL.COM 10/26/18

TODAY'S BIRTHDAY (OCT. 26)

Your cosmic birthday gift will be the addition of a number of new characters in your story, people to know, trust and love. This team will help take you where your heart has longed to go. Other highlights: an artistic breakthrough, being the envy of friends as you arrive somewhere in style and a cash prize. Aries and Leo adore you. Your lucky numbers are: 20, 21, 2, 17 and 44.

ARIES (March 21-April 19)
Had you set out to please them all, you would have been unsuccessful. But instead you create something strictly for your own pleasure and are surprised at how many others get joy from your creation.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
Speaking too much can be a function of fear, fear that if you say the thing, rejection or worse is in store. It takes confidence to be so brief. You have a gift for getting to the point. This is an act of character and strength.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)
Today it seems possible to be younger in every area of life. Youth is small, so gravity goes easy on it. Live the levity you feel, and if you don't feel it, imagine it and live that.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)
Trying to do things the "right way" is, in a sense, moving the power away from you and to the thing that is telling you what the "right way" is. The thing is often correct but not always. It's a good time to check it.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)
The move that puts you ahead today is a move toward information. Inform yourself, as this will put you in a position of choice, while those who don't know will default to one way or method.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)
You'll provide a kind, welcoming face to those who normally may not have such a thing in their realm. This is will be your gift to the world and also, because of what it elicits in others, your take from it.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23)
You don't have to be consistently one way to succeed. Loved ones are intrigued by your many facets and moods. Your determination and ambition seem to wax and wane with the moon and the tides.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21)
Mother said, "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all." And while discretion serves everyone well, it's also possible to get somewhere by shaking things up. You do it with charm and will be amusedly received.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)
Like attracts like. Use the principle to guide and inform yourself. For instance, those attracted to the troubled, intelligent types are most likely troubled and intelligent. Everyone is better for calling it what it is.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)
You'll enjoy lo-fi fun and down-to-earth delights. As your sign-mate Humphrey Bogart once said, "A hot dog at the ballpark is better than a steak at the Ritz."

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)
Whatever you're doing, don't stop. What you need now more than anything else is momentum. Getting into the flow of motion will begin any number of exciting happenings.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)
Is there a sincerer love than the love of food? You'll challenge the premise in your own way today and in the process take a probing look at your relationship with your sustenance.

LUNAR SQUARE TO ILLUSORY NEPTUNE

Infatuation is part of romance -- the irrational, unhealthy part based on the selfishness of believing people are who you want them to be instead of the people they actually are. Also, it's wonderful, intoxicating and short-lived. The moon square to Neptune the illusionist urges us not to attribute characteristics to people that they do not possess.

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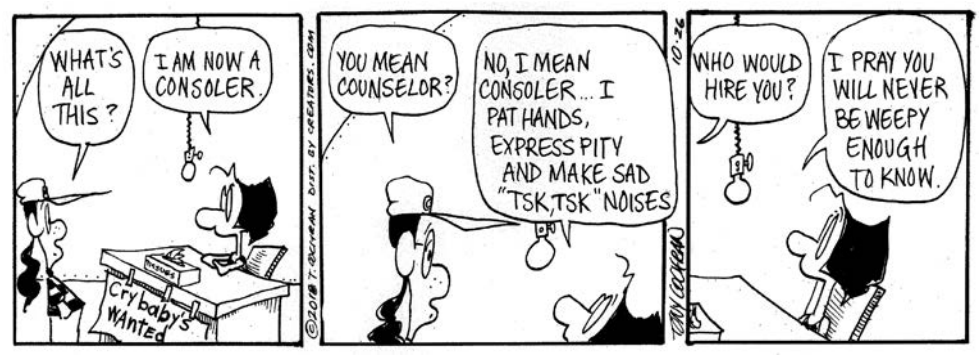
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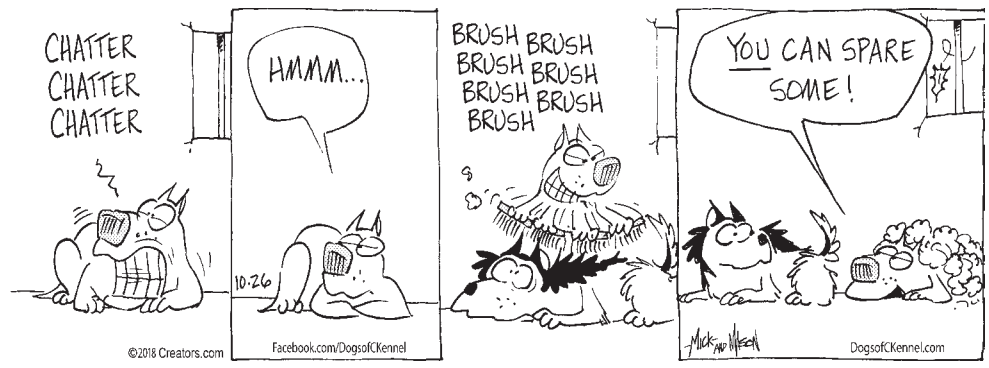
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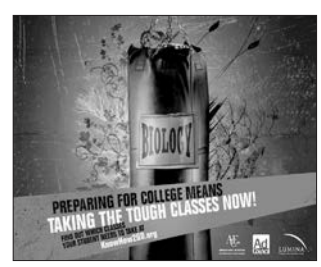
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Pipe bomb scare raises new questions about mail safety

JIM MUSTIAN
Associated Press

The wave of pipe bombs addressed to prominent Democrats has raised fresh questions about the ability of the U.S. Postal Service and private delivery companies to intercept explosives and other dangerous items.

Biohazard detection, X-rays and other technologies have had some notable successes in recent years, but officials warn that the sheer volume of mail makes it impossible to catch everything.

"The public should not have the impression that all of our mail is screened like going through security at the airport," said David Chipman, a retired agent with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. "That's not the case, and we know that from a string of cases."

None of the devices so far in this week's scare have detonated. Investigators were still trying to piece together where the packages came from and how they reached their respective destinations.

In the meantime, Phillip Bartlett of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service's New York division said hundreds of thousands of postal employees were searching the system for any additional bombs.

While two packages addressed to former Vice President Joe Biden were intercepted at postal facilities in Delaware on Thursday, a pipe bomb addressed to former Attorney General Eric Holder made it so far into the mail stream that it was returned to its purported sender: the Florida office of Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, whose name was on the return address.

Another crude bomb addressed to former CIA Director John Brennan at CNN went through the U.S. mail before a courier took it to the Time Warner Building, where the cable network has its New York offices, according to a law enforcement official who was not authorized to discuss the investigation and spoke on condition of anonymity.

"Most if not all of these packages were sent through the U.S. mail," the official said.

Those deliveries occurred even though the packages had certain suspicious features, including excessive postage, homemade labels and high-profile addressees, security experts said. The parcels also contained a number of misspellings.

"These devices are the poster children of what a suspicious package looks like," said Fred Burton, a former counterterrorism agent with the State Department who serves as chief security officer for Stratfor, a global private intelligence company.

The Postal Inspection Service, which investigates mail-related crimes, said in an email that in screening the mail, the agency relies on a "targeted strategy of specialized technology, screening protocols and employee training," as well as "state-of-the-art equipment to include portable X-ray machines."

The agency pointed to its Dangerous Mail Investigations division, a program created following the 2001 anthrax-by-mail attacks that killed five people and infected several others. The program was part of a costly security overhaul in which the Postal Service added a Biohazard Detection System at its mail-processing centers.

The Inspection Service says on its website that it has investigated "an average of 16 mail bombs over the last few years" while processing more than 170 billion pieces of mail. "That means during the last few years, the chances that a piece of mail actually contains a bomb average far less than one in 10 billion!"

The Postal Service does not have the resources to X-ray every parcel and typically reserves that technology for packages postal inspectors deem suspicious.

While the Postal Service intercepted some of the packages in this week's scare, the developments underscored the limitations of the screening technology in use, said Phil Nater, a former longtime postal inspector in New York.

"There's a lot of human activity involved before mail actually goes through a screening device or system," Nater said. "It's gotten a lot better, but it's not impossible to bypass."

The high cost of screening every parcel also limits the security measures taken by private couriers. A UPS spokesman said the company "has security measures in place, but we do not disclose those methods to maintain their effectiveness." A FedEx spokesman declined to comment.

The Postal Service has successfully intercepted a number of suspicious letters and packages in recent years.

Earlier this month, a Navy veteran in Utah was arrested in connection with several envelopes sent to President Donald Trump and top military chiefs. Authorities said at least two of the envelopes contained castor seeds, the substance from which the poison ricin is derived.

In 2013, a postal inspector in Arizona flagged a suspicious package addressed to then-Sheriff Joe Arpaio, the controversial lawman in Phoenix. Authorities said a possible smokeless powder was leaking from the parcel. A bomb squad later X-rayed the package and discovered gunpowder and other components of an explosive device. The sender was later convicted.

But John Rooney, a retired postal inspector in Philadelphia, said the system's limitations are highlighted by the massive amount of narcotics that goes through the mail every year.

"People don't understand the sheer magnitude of mail the Postal Service handles," he said. "When it comes to drugs, it's impossible. You can't stop it."



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