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Santa Monica Daily Press

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Planning commissioners share their 'secrets'

Santa Monica City Council should disclose ex parte conversations, commissioner says

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON
Daily Press Writer

Planning commissioners had nothing to hide last week and they let the public know it.

Before reviewing an application for a new Japanese restaurant, commissioners disclosed everything they knew about the proposal at 424 Wilshire Blvd. Commissioner Barbara Brown has driven past it. Commissioners Darrell Clarke, Jay Johnson and Kelly Olsen had eaten there when it was another restaurant. Commissioner Julie Dad works across the street.

Although last week's disclosure statements may sound trivial, there are proposals that come before the planning commission that are more controversial and much larger. Commissioners, as a matter of policy, disclose any relationships, conversations and knowledge that relate to a proposal. It lets the public know if any of them have conflicts of interest and whether the applicant will get a fair review.

Commission Chairman Olsen explains the policy at every meeting. Last week he expanded to his routine, wondering out loud why the Santa Monica City Council doesn't have the same policy.

Olsen plans to bring the matter before his fellow policymakers at an upcoming council meeting. It's not that he thinks any of the councilmembers are hiding anything, but the public might.

When the controversial Target store was being proposed on Pico Boulevard more than a year ago, it was figured that politicians were discussing the proposal behind closed doors. The planning commission adopted the disclosure rule shortly after the project was voted down.

"Everybody had a suspicion that deals were being made," Olsen said. But now, applicants and the public can determine if officials have any conflicts of interest.

"They feel like they got a fair shot," he said. "I think people trust the system more."

Olsen has discussed the issue with city councilmembers in the past and they haven't been adverse to it. Now he plans to push the request a little harder.

"I don't know why they haven't done it, maybe they haven't thought about it," he said. "I would think the city council would be very receptive to this because they have been neighborhood activists and they would want people to have confidence in the system."

Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press

A front window was smashed on Tuesday night at Effandi Oriental Rugs and Antique store on Montana Avenue. The owner estimates damages to be close to $5,000.

'Bar time' is the right time for looking into the sky Sunday

Upcoming meteor display reported to be the best in this lifetime

BY JOSEPH B. VERRENGIA
AP Science Writer

Brew some coffee. Unpack the lawn chairs. Astronomers predict this year's Leonids meteor display, expected to appear before dawn Sunday, will be a dazzler worth missing a little sleep.

"It's now or never" said Robert Naeye of the Astronomy Society of the Pacific. "Astronomers don't think we'll see another storm like this one until the year 2099. We will probably never see a better meteor shower in our lifetimes."

Every year scientists fly to places like the Gobi Desert or Canary Islands to watch the heavens rain fire for a few minutes in November. This year, Earth's alignment suggests that North America will be squarely beneath some of the most vigorous shooting stars. Pacific Islands and the Far East may see natural fireworks, too.

The most optimistic celestial forecasts call for a steady storm of 4,000 meteors per hour, or about 70 per minute around 2 a.m. on the West coast Sunday.

With clear skies, luck and the bonus of a nearly moonless night, people in some locations could see twice that.

The Leonids are dust particles shed by Comet Tempel-Tuttle. Like a truck barreling down a dirt road, the comet trails a cloud of dust as it orbits the sun once every 33 years.

The meteors are called Leonids because they appear to radiate from the constellation Leo, the Lion. A really big meteor is equal to a grain of rice.

Earth usually crosses a thin section of the Leonids trail; perhaps 10 meteors per hour streak across the night sky.

When the comet sweeps close to the sun, the

See SHOWERS, page 4

Tracking bin Laden after the Taliban flee cities: U.S. troops still looking in a lot of caves

Taliban officials say bin Laden 'safe and well'

BY SALLY BUZBEE
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — The United States is pursuing Osama bin Laden and Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar, believed to be on the move in the shrinking but still difficult parts of Afghanistan that their forces control.

Sharpening the focus on the war's primary targets, American special operations troops are questioning Taliban defectors and prisoners, dangling millions in reward money and hoping for a communications slip-up. Warplanes focus more bombing on mountain hide-outs and caves where Omar or bin Laden might try to disappear.

The two men, both expert in guerrilla warfare, have plenty of those remote caves and mountain tunnels — and enough friends and supplies along the Pakistani border — to make the chase difficult.

"We still have a ways to go" in tracking them, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld cautioned Wednesday.

U.S. intelligence officials believe bin Laden and Omar are still in the

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LOCAL

Sound off for healing

By Daily Press Staff

People all over the world are being asked to make some noise.

On Nov. 23, in a spirit of unprecedented solidarity, thousands of people around the world are expected to make a sound at the same time. It may be a song, a prayer, a drum, a honking horn or a ringing of a bell. The purpose is to demonstrate that human beings are one people in the world.

Citizens of Senegal, Australia, Spain, Britain, Switzerland, Brazil, the United States, Ecuador, Canada, Mexico, Cuba, New Zealand, France, Pakistan and India have been approached to take part in the first-time event. Several news organizations around the world are covering the event, including the BBC.

"A joyful noise will radiate from people everywhere on the planet at once," said Roberta Raye, one of the Los Angeles-based organizers of the World Healing Celebration. "We cannot, and need not, stand alone."

In the wave of the Sept. 11 terrorists attacks and countless other conflicts still happening around the globe, many people feel isolated, fearful and helpless, said Raye. The World Healing Celebration, a non-political, non-religious event, is designed to remind people that they have the power to generate a sense of connection with their own communities, and by extension, with the rest of the planet, she added.

Organizers are inviting people to stage their own events and to spread the word via telephone, the Internet and the airwaves.

"Make sure everyone comes to this party," Raye said. "It's a chance to bring the spirit of Thanksgiving out of our personal circles an share it with everybody, everywhere."

For more information, visit the event's Web site at www.worldhealingcelebration.org.

YOUR OPINION MATTERS!

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WEATHER

Today ... Mostly sunny. Highs in the upper 60s to mid 70s.

Friday ... Mostly clear...Except patchy night and morning low clouds and fog. Lows in the 50s. Highs in the upper 60s to mid 70s

Extended ... Variable throughout the week.

QUOTE of the DAY

"We are here to serve you."

— Santa Monica City Hall staffer

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CalEnergy sues SoCal Edison

By the Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Geothermal energy generator CalEnergy has sued Southern California Edison, saying the utility has reneged on an agreement to pay more than $100 million in debts.

CalEnergy Operating Corp. filed suit Wednesday in Imperial County Superior Court charging SoCal Edison with breach of contract. The suit claims Edison reneged an agreement to pay its past due bills once the utility took steps necessary to make it creditworthy.

Edison has denied the charges.

"Our patience, and our ability to carry Edison's past-due debt, has run out."

DAVID L. SOKOL
Chairman of CalEnergy's parent company

Edison reached a deal with the state in October designed to keep it from bankruptcy and allow it to pay $3.3 billion it owes to power generators and creditors. The agreement is a settlement of its federal lawsuit against the California Public Utilities Commission.

Edison said it wants to pay all creditors in one lump payment and expects to satisfy all debts by the end of next March.

CalEnergy says in its lawsuit that Edison has breached a June agreement to pay the renewable energy company for power purchased going forward and to pay past debts once it was returned to creditworthiness.

"Our patience, and our ability to carry Edison's past-due debt, has run out," said David L. Sokol, chairman of CalEnergy's parent company.

In a statement, Edison said it was surprised CalEnergy commented publicly "while negotiations are under way that both parties agreed would be confidential.'

Sokol said Edison's decision to pay banks, bondholders and other large creditors before renewable energy companies sparked its lawsuit. Sokol said Edison has more than $3 billion cash on hand and should use it to pay creditors sooner.

"Edison protects its shareholders while little players across the state, including vendors and landowners in Imperial County, suffer," Sokol said. "Putting us last in line to receive payment is the final insult."

Edison said it believed it was important "deal fairly and equitably with all creditors and not to single out one group for preferential payments."

Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press

Troy Regier and Johanna Brown set up their fruit stand Wednesday at the farmer's market in downtown Santa Monica, held each week.

Musicians brains are wired differently

BY SETH HETTENA
Associated Press Writer

SAN DIEGO — The brain waves of professional musicians respond to music in a way that suggests they have an intuitive sense of the notes that amateurs lack, researchers said Wednesday.

Neuroscientists, using brain-scanning MRI machine to peer inside the minds of professional German violinists, found they could hear the music simply by thinking about it, a skill amateurs in the study were unable to match.

The research offers insight into the inner workings of the brain and show that musicians' brains are uniquely wired for sound, researchers said at the annual meeting of the Society for Neuroscience

Neuroscientists are increasingly studying how we hear and play music, since few activities draw on so many functions of the brain, including memory, learning, motor control, emotion, hearing and creativity, said Dr. Robert Zatorre of the Montreal Neurological Institute.

"It offers a window onto the highest levels of human cognition," Zatorre said.

In a study by researchers at the University of Tuebingen, the brains of eight violinists with German orchestras and eight amateurs were analyzed as they silently tapped out the first 16 bars of Mozart's violin concerto in G major.

Brain scans showed professionals had more activity in the part of their brains that controlled hearing, said Dr. Gabriela Scheler of the University of Tuebingen.

"When the professionals move their fingers, they are also hearing the music in their heads," Scheler said.

Amateurs, by contrast, showed more activity in the motor cortex, the region that controls finger movements, suggesting they were more preoccupied with hitting the correct notes, she said.

Scheler, a former violinist with the Nuremberg Philharmonic Orchestra, said the findings suggest that professionals have "liberated" their minds from worrying about hitting the right notes. As a result, they are able to listen, judge and control their play, Scheler said.

"Presumably, this enhances the musical performance," she said.

In a second experiment, the two groups of violinists were asked to imagine playing the concerto music in their heads.

Zatorre, who has studied the brain's response to music for two decades, said it was the first time anyone had studied music and its relationship to motor control and imagery.

Researchers from Canada also found differences in the brain waves of professional musicians and non-musicians as they listened to musical notes.

Violinists with Canada's National Academy Orchestra and advanced pianists studying with the Royal Conservatory of Music in Ontario showed a brain wave response 40 percent higher than university students with no background in music.

The enhanced response, which occurs one-fifth of a second after the tone is played, suggests that more neurons are firing in the part of the brain that controls hearing.

Roberts is currently testing young music students ages 5 through 15 to test whether the brains of musicians are different because they came wired that way or developed as a result of training.

While the study is not complete, initial results suggest that major changes occur during childhood in the part of the brain that controls hearing, he said.

Water board votes to clean up Squaw Valley ski resort

By the Associated Press

TRUCKEE — California water regulators are stepping up their demands for environmental cleanup at the Squaw Valley ski resort near Lake Tahoe.

The California Water Quality Board for the Lahontan region voted 4-1 late Wednesday to issue a formal cleanup order in 30 days against the Sierra ski resort.

The panel was poised to issue the order Wednesday, but it backed off when the Squaw Valley Ski Corp. asked for more time to negotiate the details of the cleanup agreement.

Board member John Brissenden of Hope Valley voted against waiting a month, saying the panel has waited long enough.

The board asked the California attorney general's office in May to investigate alleged environmental damage resulting from construction of ski lifts, poorly designed ski runs and runoff from parking lots.

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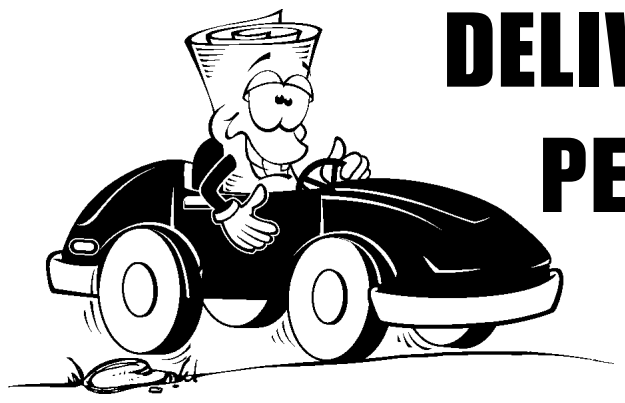

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NATIONAL

Meteor shower will light up sky

SHOWERS, from page 1

sun's heat causes it to shed more debris like a truck hitting a mud puddle. Earth gets splattered when it plows though the thick wake. It occurs every November for a few years until the particles dissipate.

In 1966, observers couldn't count the shooting stars fast enough. Estimates ranged as high as 150,000 per hour.

Comet Tempel-Tuttle most recently orbited the sun in February 1998, and since then, in the words of forecaster Joe Rao, the Leonids have "gone berserk."

While meteor displays thrill amateur stargazers, they also hold scientific promise. Comets are hurtling balls of ice and debris left over from the birth of the solar system more than 4 billion years ago.

The particles contain basic elements like iron, as well as carbon-based molecules. Some scientists believe this is how Earth was seeded with organic compounds.

"The chemical precursors to life — found in comet dust — may well have survived a plunge into early Earth's atmosphere," said NASA scientist Peter Jenniskens, who directs airborne surveys of the Leonids.

Earthbound viewers are safe during a meteor shower because the tiny particles tend to burn 15 miles from Earth. In fact, the visible meteor actually is the streak of light caused by the particle, or meteoroid, that is generating friction against the atmosphere.

But in space, the tiniest debris behaves like a speeding bullet. Satellite operators are turning their orbiting equipment edge-on into the storm so delicate sensors and solar energy arrays will not be crippled by the barrage.

Predicting the Leonids vigor has become an annual competition. Previously educated guesswork meteor predictions are now the products of sophisticated computer models, enabling scientists to nail the storm peaks within a few minutes. This year, the Earth will pass through multiple debris trails shed by the comet as long ago as 1699.

"The comet is almost four years behind us now," said Rao, who handicaps the Leonids for Sky & Telescope magazine and the American Museum of Natural History in New York. "The predictions are all over the place."

Tom Van Flandern of Meta Research in Chevy Chase, Md., a non-profit astronomy group, predicts "no fewer than five streams will pass close to the Earth, so that weak (meteor) storms may persist for several hours before the predicted strong one arrives."

How strong? Jenniskens is the most optimistic forecaster. He predicts the Leonids will peak at 4,200 per hour at 5:09 a.m. Sunday over the East Coast, 2:09 a.m. over the West Coast. Others predict a peak of 1,300 to 2,000 per hour.

Predictions elsewhere vary as widely. One group expects a bigger storm eight hours later over the Far East; William Cooke of NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center predicts no more than 800 meteors per hour over the Far East.

With so much uncertainty, most U.S. meteor chasers have decided to stay home this year. Circumstances following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks have affected some plans; airspace restrictions probably will ground Jenniskens' airborne mission.

Naeye is joining an astronomers gathering at the Kitt Peak observatory in southern Arizona, where the skies should be dark and the weather dry.

"The U.S. will get a pretty good show," Naeye said. "Everything is lining up just right."

"The U.S. will get a pretty good show. Everything is lining up just right."

ROBERT NAEYE
Astronomy Society of the Pacific

Man arrested for raising money after claiming his sister died in WTC attack

By the Associated Press

CANTON, Ohio — A man has been arrested for accepting donations from co-workers after falsely telling them he had to raise his sister's 7-year-old daughter because the mother was killed in the World Trade Center attacks.

Ronald Davis, 49, turned himself into police and faces a theft by deception charge, said Canton Police Chief Thomas W. Wyatt. If convicted he could be sentenced to up to a year in jail.

Davis' lawyer, Jeffrey Haupt, confirmed that his client made up the story.

"Ron's troubled, and he's been to a psychiatrist," lawyer Jeffrey Haupt said Tuesday. "He knows he's done wrong, and he's willing to take whatever punishment they give him."

Co-workers and a union collected money and held fund-raisers before learning the story was a hoax. The union gave Davis $1,100. Police said some co-workers also gave money directly to Davis, along with toys and clothing for the child.

Nearly $6,000 more was raised but was withheld until a co-worker could get confirmation about Davis' story through Canton police.

Canton police determined through the New York City medical examiner's office that no one with the name that Davis gave as his sister's was listed having died or was missing in the World Trade Center disaster.

"I will try to get him to give the money back and get him continued mental health treatment," Haupt said.

NATIONAL

Airports and planes still susceptible to terrorism

Could take up to three years before all bags are checked for explosives

BY JIM ABRAMS
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Fewer than 10 percent of checked bags at the nation's airports are inspected for bombs and one overworked detection machine operator was found falling asleep on the job, the Transportation Department's inspector general said Wednesday.

"That's really stunning," Sen. Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., chairman of the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee, said at a hearing on aviation security since the Sept. 11 attacks.

Inspector General Kenneth Mead told the hearing that despite some strong measures to tighten security in the past two months, "there are still alarming lapses" related to both the system and the personnel who operate it.

He was backed up by Federal Aviation Administration head Jane Garvey, who said it was disturbing that, despite attempts to improve security, "there continue to be failures to properly screen and detect weapons at security checkpoints."

Both stressed the importance of quick congressional action on a far-reaching aviation security bill that has been stalled by the inability of the

House and Senate to work out differences between their two versions.

Lawmakers from the two chambers postponed a third open meeting planned for later Wednesday on the legislation, which is hung up mainly over the issue of whether the nation's 28,000 baggage screeners, now employees of private security firms, should become federal workers.

Instead, they met behind closed doors to discuss possible compromises.

One aspect of the bill is moving toward inspection of all check-in bags, and Mead said expanded use of explosives detection machines was No. 1 on his list of steps to ensure that air travel is safe.

He said that not only are the $1 million machines not widely dispersed, but those airports that have them often use them only sporadically. A survey by his office over the past weekend of 30 machines at nine airports found that 73 percent were not in continuous use.

In addition, private security firms don't have enough screeners trained to operate the machines, and at one airport a screener scheduled for a 20-hour shift was seen falling asleep.

Garvey said that at the current pace it would take until 2004 before all bags could be screened for explosives. "We are not where we want to be."

The two officials said some effective steps had been taken to tighten security since Sept. 11. Included were more thorough background checks on screeners, limits on carryon bags, more law enforcement at airports, more use of air marshals on planes, use of watch lists to detect suspicious passengers, fortification of cockpit doors on all major airlines, limiting access to secure areas and use of the National Guard.

But Mead said his office and the FAA, in checks over the past several weeks, found some 90 security problems, including screeners missing dangerous items such as knives in carryon bags and airlines not carrying out random checks of passengers.

House Democratic leader Dick Gephardt of Missouri, speaking at a news conference on the need to pass the aviation security legislation, noted that in the past two days there have been two more security breaches: at Logan Airport in Boston, where a screener walked away from her post for four minutes, letting passengers walk through unchecked, and in Miami, where a man bypassed security with two meat cleavers. Last week a man passed through an initial screening check at Chicago's O'Hare carrying seven knives and a stun gun in his bag.

One of the big problems, those at the hearing said, was the lack of consistency. "You know something is wrong when screeners are confiscating thousands of nail clippers but allowing people with arsenals of weapons through," said Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill.

Senators want improved airport security

BY MARK SHERMAN
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Alarm bells sounded an instant after the camera scanned Ali Kato's face. She had been caught by a computer search of electronic mug shots.

No one moved in the crowded room, which included two U.S. senators.

The incident was only a test, done by Lau Technologies of Littleton, Mass., at the invitation of the senators. Kato, 22, is no terrorist, just a Los Angeles resident who is an intern for Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif.

But the demonstration Wednesday of security devices based on facial recognition, fingerprints, hand geometry and iris scans — the growing field of biometrics — probably represented the future of airport and border security. Legislation proposed by Feinstein and Sen. Jon Kyl, R-Ariz., would require the use of biometric information for all applicants for visas to enter the United States.

"Only if we can identify terrorists planning attacks in the United States do we stand a chance of stopping them," Feinstein said, at the start of the meeting of her Judiciary subcommittee on technology and terrorism. "Only with biometrics do we have a chance."

The promise of biometrics lies in its use of information that cannot be changed, such as fingerprints, and computer-age speed. Systems already are in use in some airports, including San Francisco's where a hand geometry system helps control access to secure areas. At the main airport in Iceland, machines that scan the iris, the colored part of the eye, are being tested.

Among the government officials and half-dozen makers of biometric scanners who testified Wednesday, there was agreement that the most effective system would use at least two pieces of information.

The FBI, for instance, had no fingerprints on file for any of the 19 hijackers who seized four airplanes in the Sept. 11 attacks, said Michael D. Kirkpatrick, the FBI's assistant director in charge of the Criminal Justice Information Services Division.

"No single biometric application is going to be the be all and end all," Kirkpatrick said.

bin Laden says he's ready to die; war will continue

SEARCH, from page 1

region of Afghanistan not under northern alliance control, said a U.S. official who spoke on condition of anonymity. Each is moving around, but they aren't believed to be together.

It isn't thought likely that bin Laden will try to leave the country, because such movements could expose him to capture.

A Taliban official said Wednesday that Omar and his "guest" bin Laden were "safe and well." Omar claimed in a radio address Tuesday that he was in the Taliban's southern stronghold of Kandahar, the site Wednesday of sporadic fighting between Taliban and rebel Pashtun leaders.

The United States is bombing areas in the south and in the east, especially around Jalalabad, where bin Laden is known to have hide-outs.

"Bunker-buster" bombs can dig under the surface and explode in a tunnel. Fuel-air explosives can produce tremendous heat and suck out a cave or tunnel's oxygen.

Defectors and prisoners are probably the best hope for information on where bin Laden is now, said a former senior U.S. intelligence official with experience in South Asia. Even rumors or hints — about something such as a recent supply run to a cave, for example — could prove a breakthrough.

In addition, "It may very well be that money will talk at some point," Rumsfeld said, referring to the millions in reward money the United States has offered.

Or, Taliban troops and commanders on the run might take fewer precautions with radios and phones, allowing U.S. eavesdropping aircraft to pick up communications and thus get hints to bin Laden's location.

U.S. special forces also have been watching roads in southern Afghanistan to see who passes by, Rumsfeld said, and "to stop people that they think ought to be stopped."

A Taliban official said Wednesday that Omar and his "guest" bin Laden were "safe and well." Omar claimed in a radio address Tuesday that he was in the Taliban's southern stronghold of Kandahar, the site Wednesday of sporadic fighting between Taliban and rebel Pashtun leaders.

Bin Laden is believed to move from cave to cave — some a three days' walk into the mountains — with only a group of highly trusted aides.

The amount of support he can still muster among thousands of past supporters is key.

The Taliban may fracture, with some commanders deciding to become guerrilla fighters in mountainous southern Afghanistan, and others making peace with the Pashtun leaders now taking power, said another U.S. official.

Afghan fighters have a history of retreating from cities but then waging effective guerrilla warfare in mountains for years afterward, essentially thwarting an enemy's larger goals, said Charles Fairbanks, a central Asia expert at John Hopkins University.

"Particularly if they fled to the east, that's a very difficult situation," Fairbanks said. "They have so many sympathizers in Pakistan, and Pakistan really has no control of the situation there."

Such supporters could keep bin Laden and Omar supplied with food, guns and hiding places, said Andrew Hess, an expert on Pakistan and Afghanistan at Tufts University.

In addition, the former guerrilla leader who took control of Jalalabad from the Taliban, Mullah Yunus Khalis, has long-standing ties with bin Laden's Arab followers. Bin Laden is believed to have camps in the mountains near there.

Most U.S. officials and outside experts do not think Omar would ever give bin Laden up, despite what Rumsfeld called signs of strain between the two.

In his most recent interview, bin Laden said he was "ready to die." Chillingly, he predicted the war against America would continue even if he were gone.

COMICS

The Dinette Set by Julie Larson

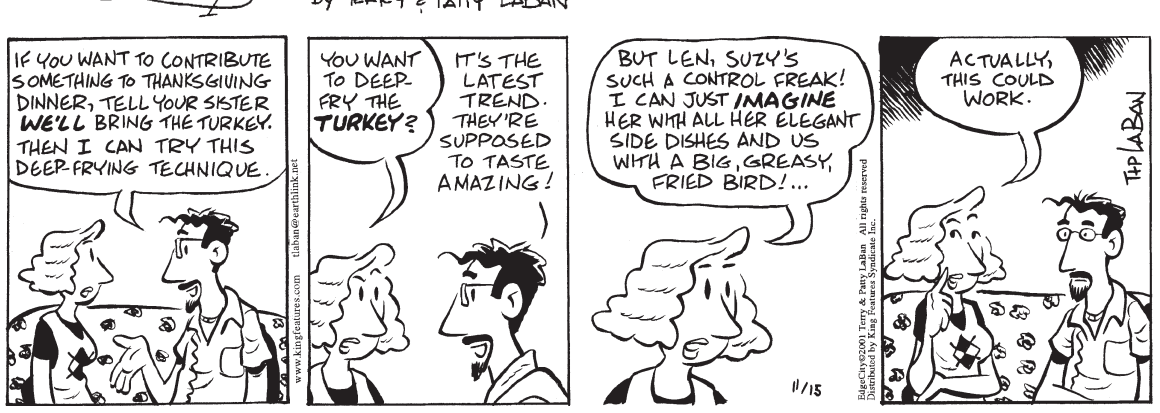
Natural Selection®

By Russ Wallace

"Pastor Bob, we just wanted you to know it's not personal. It's just that ... well, all the bites are starting to make some folks nervous."

edge City

by TERRY & PATTY LABAN



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ACROSS

1 Pleased
5 Irritate
10 Hitchcock film
11 Blonde
12 Rapper-turned-actor
13 Cheap
14 Rocket part
16 Sudden plunge
20 Enjoys the rink
23 Stout of who-dunits
24 Called to the phone
25 Smoothing tool
27 Had lunch
28 Monsters
29 Bull accessory
32 Oats holders
36 Michael Jackson hit
39 Vaccine type
40 Anaheim team
41 Nautilus captain
42 Car parts
43 Sunup site

DOWN

1 Pleased look
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3 Copies
4 Relaxation of tensions
5 Exact copy
6 Equivocated
7 Lumberman's tool
8 Swamp
9 Cut off
11 Dentist's advice
15 Like some dorms
17 Pakistan neighbor
18 Sell
19 Alimony recipients
20 Bridge
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28 "Dukes"
30 Computer key
31 Stirs up
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34 Whale schools
35 Pay phone part
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37 Music's Brian
38 Before now

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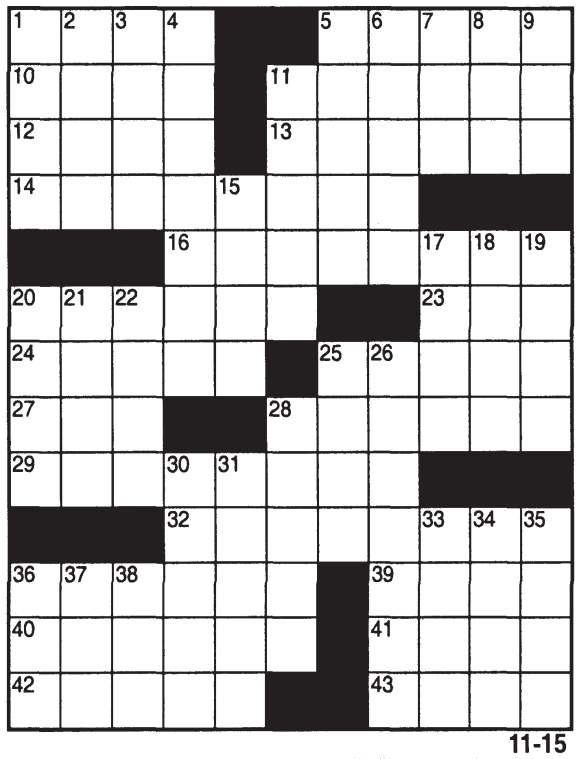
R	E	T	I	E	■	R	U	L	E	R
S	L	A	P	■	■	B	A	R	S	■

Yesterday's answer



11-15

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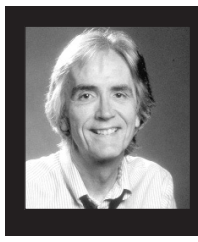

NEWS OF THE WEIRD

by Chuck Shepard

Judge's ruling: cheat and don't tell

— Britain's Legal Services Commission granted imprisoned murderer Shaun Armstrong, 39 (whose victim was 3 years old), legal aid for his privacy-rights lawsuit for about $25,000 against the friend to whom he confessed in writing and who turned him in. Armstrong wants back the letters he sent the friend, claiming ownership of his confession (which reads, "Yes, I'm responsible for the crime, but please don't tell anybody.").

— An Ontario Superior Court judge ruled in May that spouses have no legal duty to inform each other of their adulterous affairs. A 52-year-old man had sued his estranged wife for about $210,000 (U.S.) for breaching her duty of "good faith" and "honesty" by hiding her affairs from him for 21 years, but the best the judge would do is agree only in cases where "hazardous" sexual activity outside the marriage would subject the spouse to health risks.

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BACK PAGE

Vegas cigar enthusiasts light up for annual event

BY JERRY FINK
Associated Press Writer

LAS VEGAS — Smoking a cigar usually is a special occasion, one that requires the right amount of time and the right place to be thoroughly enjoyed.

A person can't smoke a cigar on a coffee break, and even if possible, co-workers would probably raise a stink.

Those who take cigars seriously, such as members of the Pheasant Cigars club, don't want to be rushed when they are lighting up a $200 Opus X or even an $18 Padron Aniversario. Nor do they want to be hassled about the aroma.

Several members of the club will be among an estimated 5,000 avid cigar-smoking enthusiasts who will attend Cigar Aficionado magazine's sixth annual "Big Smoke Las Vegas" at Paris Las Vegas hotel-casino this weekend.

The two "Big Smoke" evenings will include samples from more than 35 premium cigar producers that will have exhibits. Samples of liquors, wines, beer and other beverages and food also will be available.

Seminars will cover such subjects as taste testing, tips on how to buy cigars and rolling your own.

"Hardcore cigar smokers don't just light cigars up like a cigarette," Carl Valentino said.

Valentino and his brother, Paul, are co-owners of Pheasant Cigars, which is a private club for people who like to be with friends while smoking cigars, and a retail outlet for cigars not found at convenience stores.

Club members sit in deep-cushioned leather chairs while reading, watching television or visiting with fellow members.

Men and women who take their pastime seriously enough to join a club are not those who spend 50 cents for a cigar.

"They pay attention to labels, flavors, wrappers and how the cigar burns," noted Valentino, who managed Pheasant Cigars for 18 months before he and his brother decided to buy the business.

The Valentinos are late bloomers in the cigar business. They bought Pheasant Cigars in February.

The company was about to close its doors when the brothers decided to take it over.

"Before we bought it we sat down with the club members and asked them if they really wanted a cigar club, otherwise we would move on to something else," said Valentino, who was a golf professional in Denver before moving to Las Vegas more than two years ago. "They said yes, so we took it on."

"For a cigar smoker, Las Vegas is heaven."

GORDON MOTT
Executive Editor of Cigar Aficionado

The club had only 10 members at the time. Now it has about 30 and is growing. Dues are $150 a month, which includes lockers for humidors and the privilege of relaxing in a smoke-friendly environment.

"But what they are really getting for their money are the intangibles," Valentino said. "You are getting a network of friends you can trust."

The club once was the domain of men but now has several women members.

Gordon Mott, executive editor of Cigar Aficionado, said since his magazine was founded almost 10 years ago, the number of women cigar smokers has increased dramatically.

"That's one of the things that the magazine has accomplished," Mott said during a telephone interview from his New York City office. "We have stripped away a lot of the taboos, and one of those was women smoking cigars."

Mott said 90 percent of cigar consumers smoke three cigars a week or less, and of those, 92 percent don't inhale.

Smoking has been banned in many public places, such as restaurants. That, combined with a campaign against tobacco by the health industry, has reduced the number of cigar smokers, but Mott says the decline has been negligible.

"Compared against 1992, we believe there are two to three times as many cigar smokers today," Mott said. "And the number is a good 21/2 times larger for hand-rolled cigars.

"There was a period where consumption was up three times, but it has retreated from that level.

Still, consumption is much larger now than 10 years ago.

"When we launched the magazine, a man started smoking cigars at the age of 40, on average," Mott said.

"So from the beginning, our audience was always a 40-plus median age. But since the magazine has stripped away the mystique, men in the 25 to 40 age range have picked up a cigar and tried it for the first time.

"We aren't talking about youths, but young men, many of whom are professionals who are attracted to and comfortable with smoking cigars."

"We're going through a classic revolution," Mott said. "Look at wine and spirits. When people first come to a product, like wine and spirits, they tend to gravitate to the mildest tasting, simplest ones. Mild cigars dominated the marketplace in the beginning, but today a lot more people are seeking out full-flavored, stronger cigars with more complexity."

"For a cigar smoker, Las Vegas is heaven."

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