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Santa Monica Daily Press

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Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press Staff

Building owner Dana Pascoe surveys the fire scene with Santa Monica Police officer Larry Nicols Friday morning.

Tenants ousted by arson

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON
Daily Press Staff Writer

Ten residents are still forced to sleep in someone else's bed after an arsonist started a fire in their apartment building on 10th Street six days ago.

The tenants at 848 10th Street have had to relocate because their apartment is without electricity. A fire was set to the building's utility room early Monday morning, charring the main electrical circuit. Apartments in the area also were without power for an extended period, according to neighbors.

Building owner Dana Pascoe has tried to get the situation corrected, but has run into obstacles getting power restored with California Edison. Her tenants are equally frustrated.

"Technically we are back in the building, but physically we are not," said Rosemary, who declined to give her last name.

Santa Monica Fire Department investigators are ruling arson caused the fire. Similar fires have occurred in the area in the past year. Officials believe someone intentionally set a storage locker on fire in a carport off the alleyway behind the building.

"This is really a hate thing ... someone around here doesn't like us," said Rosemary. "This person knew what he was doing.

"This person is a professional," she added.

Fire department investigator Joe Paneno said in many of the carport fires that have occurred in the neighborhoods between Montana and Broadway Avenues, and Second and 14th Streets, the areas were cluttered with debris. That could be one reason why they are being targeted by arsonists.

But Rosemary said the area under her apartment is kept up and is free of garbage.

"I have lived here for 27 years and it is very important to me what our neighborhood is like," she said.

Monday's fire is the seventh arson case in alley carports in the past year. A task force has been formed between the city fire and police departments in attempt to link the crimes.

Judge decides woman picks wrong man in suit

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON
Daily Press Staff Writer

Because Donnamarie Fontaine of Santa Monica isn't wearing a cervical collar, she believes she's out $3,600 in a case one judge likened to a crapshoot.

Fontaine was an innocent driver whose parked car was hit by a man who had just been shot at the wheel of his car, probably in a gang-related drive-by shooting on Fifth Street. Though the stricken man's car totaled Fontaine's vehicle, a judge ruled she should have sued the shooter instead.

Fontaine brought the matter to Santa Monica small claims court in an attempt to recoup her losses. But the burden of proof fell hard on Fontaine. Her brush with gang life has left her miffed, not so much with crime as with the justice system.

"This is not justice when I am sitting there minding my own business at 8:30 at night two days after Christmas in my living room watching Who Wants To Be A Millionaire ... how can I be out almost $4,000?" she said during her testimony. "If there is no justice here, I can't even begin to tell you how I will lose faith in the system ...."

"This is not justice when I am sitting there minding my own business at 8:30 at night two days after Christmas in my living room watching Who Wants To Be A Millionaire ... how can I be out almost $4,000?"

DONNAMARIE FONTAINE
Santa Monica resident

Fontaine gambled on a favorable ruling rather than taking a $2,500 offer from the insurance carrier covering Juan Juarez, who owned the target car. She made her decision even though pro tem judge Sheldon Cone hinted that she accept the offer.

"This is Las Vegas. You are about to roll the

See LAWSUIT, page 4

Coastal Commission hears public on how to develop Malibu

By the Associated Press

Under order from Gov. Gray Davis to create a land-use plan for the celebrity haven of Malibu, the California Coastal Commission held its first public hearing on a draft that officials will spend the next several months debating.

Malibu city officials, members of the public and others met Thursday to begin reviewing a coastal development plan for the 27-mile stretch of shoreline that has no plan a quarter-century after enactment of a state law requiring local governments to have one.

The move is designed to cut down on headaches for the commission, which frequently finds its agenda bogged down by requests from Malibu citizens, who must get permits from the commission because their 12,575-resident city lacks its own development plan.

Just Friday the commission approved a request from actor Stacy Keach to repair and improve his secondary driveway. DreamWorks SKG co-founder David Geffen had a request before the commission to remodel his house.

The commission's other concerns have centered on broader issues concerning protecting, using and developing the coast.

Malibu, which incorporated in 1991 in part because residents opposed the development plans contained in Los Angeles County's coastal plan, has been working for some 4 1/2 years on its own plan. Although the city has submitted draft land-use plans to the commission, it failed to submit a document approved by the City Council until after the state ordered the commission to do the job itself.

Thursday's hearing centered on questions about the process for creating the plan, a draft version of which must be approved in January.

Officials then have several more months to work on the plan before a September implementation deadline. Concerns about the plan's water-quality, environmental and public access planks also were discussed.

The plan includes some 400 policy recommendations, with officials disagreeing on about half of them, said Peter Douglas, the commission's executive director.

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LOCAL

Hotels trying to fill rooms by offering deals

By the Daily Press Staff

As part of a citywide promotion to bolster the local economy and fill hotel rooms, the Santa Monica Convention and Visitors Bureau is shelling out deals for the holidays.

The "There's No Place Like Home" program features discounts, package deals and "gift with purchases" at merchant and retail outlets in districts throughout the city. Key to the campaign's success is the call for local residents to invite friends and family to shop and stay in Santa Monica. To promote the program, the bureau has added special "local's only" deals. By logging onto to its Web site, santamonica.com, locals can see the program's special promotions, community open house events and hotel discounts.

To boost occupancy during the off-season, the bureau has launched an additional program with 17 Santa Monica hotel properties. "I Wish I had An Extra Bedroom" offers residents of Santa Monica discounts and package upgrades for themselves or visiting friends and family. Residents simply flash a valid California identification or drivers license showing proof of Santa Monica residency upon check-in. The special "local's rate" is available Nov. 1, 2001 through Feb. 19, 2002, including rates like $89 at the Hotel Carmel; $250 at Hotel Oceana and $150 at the Fairmont Miramar Hotel. Some of those prices are significantly less than the normal rates.

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WEATHER

Today ... Areas of night through morning low clouds and fog...Otherwise variable high clouds. Lows in the 50s. Highs in the upper 60s to mid 70s.

Saturday Night and Sunday ... Areas of night through morning low clouds and fog...Otherwise mostly clear. Lows in the mid to upper 50s. Highs in the upper 60s to mid 70s.

Extended ... Areas of night through morning low clouds and fog...Otherwise mostly clear. Lows in the 50s. Highs in the upper 60s to mid 70s.

QUOTE of the DAY

"The road is better than the inn."
— Cervantes

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Somber mood surrounds newest U.S. mosque

BY STEW MAGNUSON
Daily Press Correspondent

GARDEN GROVE, Calif. — The 17-meter high minarets and dome of the Islamic Society of Orange County's unfinished $2.5 million mosque rises above a quiet residential neighborhood near Little Saigon about 50 kilometers south of Los Angeles.

Inside, local politicians, members of the congregation and religious leaders from the nearby Christian, Jewish, Hindu and Buddhist communities gathered earlier this month to celebrate the society's project to create a building large enough to serve the approximately 100,000 Muslims in this sprawling suburb of Los Angeles.

When the grand opening was scheduled months ago, members of the congregation said the ceremony was expected to be a joyous event, but the aftermath of the Sept. 11 attacks turned it into a more somber occasion.

While members said they were completely behind the United States' war on terrorism, all expressed concern that the continued bombing of Afghanistan was creating unnecessary suffering for the civilians caught in the middle.

"All of us want justice, and all of us want whoever did this to be punished, but the bombing in Afghanistan is hurting innocent people," said Sahiha Khan, 24, media relation coordinator for the Council on American-Islamic Relations.

The Islamic Center recently received news that a brother and uncle of a member of the congregation was killed as a result of the bombing, Khan said.

"I know there are cluster bombs. And I know that cluster bombs don't differentiate between the Taliban and civilians," she said.

While it's true than Muslims have fought many wars throughout history during Ramadan, the methods of waging war have changed, said Muzammil H. Siddiq, the society's director and leader of one of the largest Muslim congregations in the United States.

"In the old days, soldiers fought in front of each other with swords, the population wasn't involved ... but now war involves everybody," said the society's director, Muzammil H. Siddiq, the leader of one of the largest Muslim congregations in the United States.

Bt not everyone in his congregation agrees on how the war should be won.

"All of us want justice, and all of us want whoever did this to be punished, but the bombing in Afghanistan is hurting innocent people."

— SAHIHA KHAN
Media Relation Coordinator for the Council on American-Islamic Relations

Dr. Naina Rahman, 59, said the quickest way for the United States to end the suffering is for a quick victory. "I don't care if it's Ramadan or not," he said. The U.S. Army should ignore the Northern Alliance, and march in with 100,000 troops, surround the enemy and isolate them from the rest of the country, he said. "Just finish them off," he said

As the United States circles in on Taliban strongholds, Siddiqi hopes there is a pause in the bombing for the sake of the civilians as the holy month of Ramadan started Friday.

"The bombing should be reduced drastically, and some other diplomatic means used to apprehend the criminals. There is nothing in Afghanistan to bomb except human beings," Siddiqi said.

As the refugee population in and outside of Afghanistan begins to climb and winter sets in, non-combatants caught in the middle will suffer enormously, he said. "The criminal element is not going to suffer much. It is the people, so there should be some other methods used," he added.

Pausing the bombing campaign during Ramadan would not only be good public relations for the administration of President George W. Bush, Siddiqi said, it would give both sides of the conflict a chance to use diplomacy and reflect on their actions over the past weeks

The Sept. 11 attack has left the Orange County Muslim community on edge. While there hasn't been any incidents aimed at the center, there were a few threatening phone calls immediately after the attack, Siddiqi said. Security concerns and efforts to reach out to the non-Muslim community are two of the reasons the mosque's construction was delayed. The water and electricity were only connected hours before the opening ceremony.

Siddiqi said the center has embarked on an outreach program to explain Islam at schools, colleges and non-Muslim religious institutions. So far, the response has been positive. President Bush's clear message to the nation that the terrorists did not represent Islam was crucial, Siddiqi said.

"That changed the atmosphere completely. There could have been a lot of hate, and violence, but it was drastically reduced," Siddiqi added.

Kamal Chohan, a 16-year-old high school student, said that message hadn't reached some of his classmates. "They call me 'camel' instead of my name 'Kamal' and ask if Osama bin Laden is my uncle," he said. "I know they're joking, but it still pinches a little."

Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press
Cab driver Norik Bagramin reads the Santa Monica Daily Press while he waits for a fare on Arizona Avenue Wednesday morning.

Algerian charged with aiding millennium plot to blow up LAX

BY TOM HAYS
Associated Press Writer

NEW YORK— An Algerian man was charged Friday with helping a terrorist trained by Osama bin Laden in the failed plot to bomb the Los Angeles International Airport during millennium celebrations.

U.S. authorities on Thursday served Samir Ati Mohamed, 32, with an extradition warrant. Canadian authorities said Mohamed had been in custody in Vancouver on alleged immigration violations since July.

Authorities filed charges against Mohamed under seal last month. A criminal complaint made public Friday accuses him of trying to get weapons for Ahmed Ressam so Ressam could raise money for the Los Angeles attack by robbing banks.

The plot was foiled when Ressam — who trained in bin Laden-financed terrorist camps in Afghanistan — was arrested entering the country in late 1999 with a trunkload of explosives. He pleaded guilty and agreed to testify against other terrorism suspects in hopes of reducing a potential 130-year sentence.

Mohamed allegedly agreed ``to get Ressam two hand grenades and a machine gun with a silencer," according to an FBI affidavit. Thecomplaint also accuses him of working with another man, Mokhtar Haouari, to obtain ``a credit card in an alias for Ressam's use in connection with his planned terrorist operation and jihad work."

The plot was foiled when Ressam — who trained in bin Laden-financed terrorist camps in Afghanistan — was arrested entering the country in late 1999 with a trunkload of explosives. He pleaded guilty and agreed to testify against other terrorism suspects in hopes of reducing a potential 130-year sentence.

Mohamed ended up providing a 9mm semiautomatic pistol with a silencer, knowing Ressam intended a terrorist attack in the United States, court papers said. Ressam used the pistol in an August 1999 holdup attempt at a Montreal currency exchange, papers said.

The complaint charges Mohamed with two counts of conspiring to commit international terrorism. If convicted, he could receive life in prison.

Ressam became the key witness in a New York trial at which Haouari was convicted of participating in the same plot. Ressam told the court he and Mohamed talked about ``blowing up a neighborhood in Canada where there was an Israeli interest."

Mohamed suggested that any bomb ``be implanted in a gasoline truck for a larger and more serious explosion," Ressam testified. He also said Mohamed and some friends wanted to start their own training camp in Afghanistan.

Haouari, who faces up to 50 years in prison, had been scheduled for sentencing this month. A judge postponed the sentencing until Dec. 17 after prosecutors revealed Ressam had failed to disclose the Montreal robbery attempt _ information that the defense could have used to attack his credibility. Haouari's lawyer has said he will seek a new trial.

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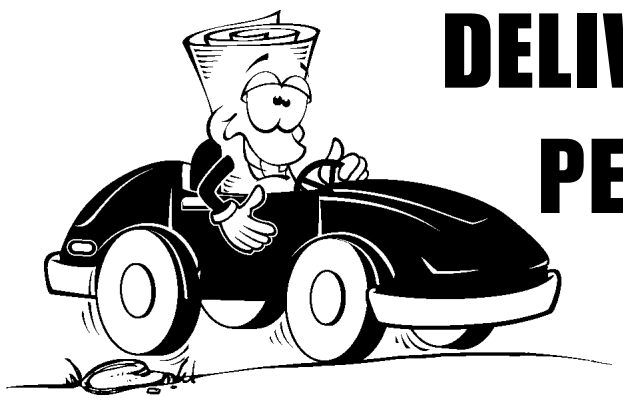

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STATE

Hewlett fires back with details of opposition to Compaq deal

BY BRIAN BERGSTEIN
AP Business Writer

SAN JOSE, Calif. — A day after Hewlett-Packard Co. detailed its $23 billion plan to acquire Compaq Computer Corp., key opponent Walter B. Hewlett laid the groundwork for a potential proxy fight.

Hewlett told the Securities and Exchange Commission he plans to file a proxy statement to solicit shareholders on the matter. His filing included an analysis presented to the Hewlett family's trust by advisers who concluded that acquiring Compaq was a bad deal.

Those advisers said the merger would dilute HP's profitable printer business and fail to improve HP's market position in high-end servers and services — assuming the complicated integration even could be carried out.

Hewlett has not yet decided whether to actively lobby shareholders to vote the deal down, but Friday's filing lets him keep his options open, a spokesman said.

Hewlett, whose family interests own more than 5 percent of HP stock, is the oldest son of HP co-founder William Hewlett and also a member of HP's board.

His filing said he was joined by sisters Eleanor Hewlett Gimon and Mary Hewlett Jaffe, the William R. Hewlett Revocable Trust and one of its trustees, Edwin E. van Bronkhorst, a former HP chief financial officer.

HP shares fell 59 cents, or 2.7 percent, to $21.50 on the New York Stock Exchange on Friday. Compaq shares lost 40 cents, or 3.7 percent, to $10.30.

Analysts and investors will pore over the fine print of the prospectus HP and Compaq filed Thursday to decide whether to support the deal or join in opposition with Walter Hewlett.

With a 10.4 percent stake, HP's largest shareholder is the charitable foundation begun in 1964 by HP co-founder David Packard and his wife, Lucile.

That organization's chief financial officer did not return a call seeking comment Friday, but he has said the prospectus would be key as the foundation reaches its decision over the next few weeks.

Packard's son, David W. Packard, who came out against the deal and sharply criticized HP management last week, is not on the board of the foundation, though two of his sisters are.

HP and Compaq said together they would create a market leader in business computing and data storage, improve the economics of their struggling personal-computer divisions and ``create a stronger, more efficient operating model with increased potential for growth."

The report said the companies combined would have lost $614 million in the nine months ended July 31. But HP and Compaq contend that because of cost savings and new opportunities, the deal would boost their combined operating profit by $2.5 billion in 2004.

Faced with the prospect that opposition by the sons of HP's revered founders could sink the deal and put her job in jeopardy, chairwoman and chief executive Carly Fiorina this week sought to reassure employees that she is not at odds with the heirs.

In an internal memo disclosed to the SEC, Fiorina said many news media have made too much of Hewlett and Packard's criticisms and``think they have a story they can use to sell newspapers."

``I get frustrated when I see lazy reporting on complicated issues," she wrote. ``It is far easier to dream up a feud that doesn't exist than to research complex, far-reaching, industry-changing business concepts."

Asked to elaborate, HP spokeswoman Rebeca Robboy said Fiorina is keeping an ``open dialogue" with Hewlett, Packard and their foundations. Hewlett attended HP board meetings Thursday and Friday, but Robboy said she could not comment on what transpired.

"I get frustrated when I see lazy reporting on complicated issues. It is far easier to dream up a feud that doesn't exist than to research complex, far-reaching, industry-changing business concepts."

— CARLY FIORINA
Hewlett Packard Chief Executive/Chairwoman

Judge: car owner not liable

LAWSUIT, from page 1

dice. If you lose, you get nothing," he told her. "It's not a slam dunk for you."

Juarez wasn't driving the target car. At the wheel was his ex-stepdaughter's boyfriend, who was shot in the back, reportedly by a rival gang member. The judge in the case was persuaded that his mere ownership of the car involved in the shooting doesn't make him liable for damages. The trigger man was probably responsible, he held.

Fontaine sued without an attorney in small claims court because she was short of cash. "No one wants to take the case because it doesn't generate enough money... no one is walking around in a cervical collar," she said. She suggested that had she sustained an obvious injury, lawyers would have beat a path to court for her.

The case apparently wasn't easy to decide. The first judge to hear it said he'd never seen anything like it in his 30-plus years in legal practice. So he passed it on to Cone, who ruled by mail that Juarez owes her nothing.

bin Laden strategist dead, say U.S. officials

Military chief reported to be victim of U.S. airstrike

BY KATHY GANNON
Associated Press Writer

KABUL, Afghanistan — Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar has reportedly agreed to leave his headquarters in Kandahar and turn over the southern city to two local Pashtun leaders. U.S. officials said Osama bin Laden's military chief was believed to have been killed in an American airstrike.

The Afghan Islamic Press, a Pakistan-based agency, said Omar agreed to leave Kandahar within 24 hours and head for the mountains following discussions with "close friends and army commanders."

But at the Pentagon, Rear Adm. John Stufflebeem said he didn't put much stock in the report, which could not be independently confirmed.

"I don't believe it," Stufflebeem told a news conference. "I think that our forces who are there are still operating under the assumption that it is a hostile environment. I think the opposition groups are operating in the same way."

The military chief who was apparently killed, Mohammed Atef, was a close confidant of bin Laden, and his daughter was married to bin Laden's son. U.S. officials suspect him of involvement in the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon as well as the bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998.

The report about Omar came after U.S. warplanes struck positions near Kandahar and the northern city of Kunduz — the Islamic militia's two principal remaining strongholds _ on Friday, the first day of Ramadan.

Under the reported deal, control of Kandahar will pass to Mullah Naqibullah and Haji Basher, two former commanders of Afghan resistance forces in the war against Soviet invaders who are not members of the Taliban.

Basher is close to Yunus Khalis, a Pashtun leader who took over the northeastern city of Jalalabad this week. Pashtuns are Afghanistan's largest ethnic group, and served as the backbone of the Taliban's harsh five-year regime.

The latest U.S. bombardment in Afghanistan came despite earlier calls from some Muslim nations — including key ally Pakistan — for restraint during Islam's holy month.

Pakistan noted the airstrikes were much less intense than in recent days and weeks.

"The bombing has been reduced," said Pakistani foreign ministry spokesman Aziz Ahmed Khan, adding that U.S.-led military operations would continue until aims were achieved.

Hardline Islamic groups staged small pro-Taliban rallies in major Pakistani cities on Friday, criticizing President Gen. Pervez Musharraf for supporting the United States in the war. Only 800 to 900 protesters turned out in the capital, Islamabad.

Even before Ramadan began, U.S. planners had signaled a change in tactics following the rout of the Taliban in much of the country over the past week. American commanders have said that raids will now be more tightly targeted, aimed at bin Laden and the top Taliban leadership.

That strategy could be paying off.

A U.S. official in Washington, speaking on condition of anonymity, said there was credible evidence that Atef, the No. 3 figure in bin Laden's al-Qaida network, was killed by an airstrike in the capital, Kabul, in the past two days. But another U.S. official said Atef's body has not been located.

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, speaking at a news conference in Great Lakes, Ill., said reports of Atef's death "seem authoritative."

Previously, Pentagon officials had said some senior Taliban and al-Qaida leaders had been killed in recent days, but had offered no names. Taliban spokesman Mohammed Taher Agha, in an interview with the British Broadcasting Corp. on Friday, dismissed those earlier assertions as "baseless."

Rumsfeld said U.S. special forces have been involved in ground combat, killing Taliban and al-Qaida fighters. No Americans have died in the operations, he said.

The Pentagon chief also said high-level Taliban leaders have been captured by opposition Afghan forces and that American officials were planning to interrogate them.

Anti-Taliban forces have been besieging Kandahar, the Taliban's home base, but eyewitnesses and even an anti-Taliban leader had said the Islamic militia's troops still appeared to have a firm grip on the southern Afghan city.

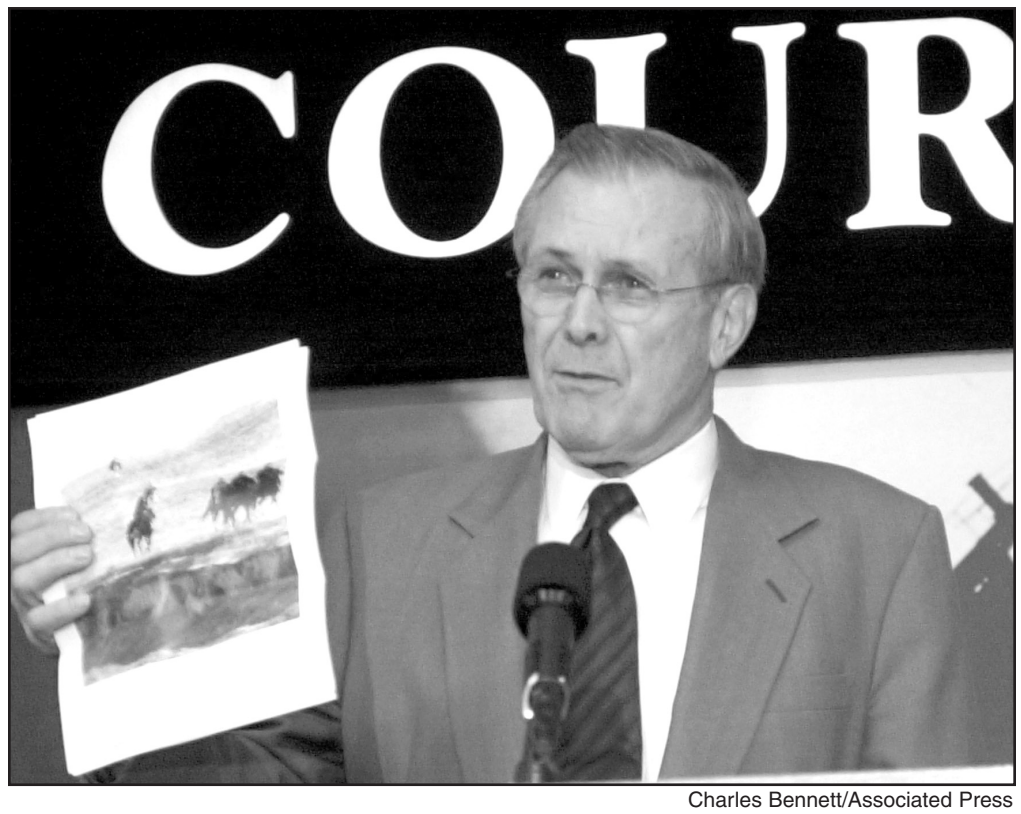
"The Taliban still have a strong hold on Kandahar. They are digging in," said a spokesman for Pashtun tribal leaders organized as an anti-Taliban force, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The spokesman estimated that 70 percent of Taliban commanders have chosen to follow Omar's call to keep fighting, while 30 percent don't want to fight.

In other developments:

• British troops arrived at the Bagram airfield, north of Kabul, on what the Ministry of Defense said was a mission to prepare the facility for use in a future humanitarian mission. France sent its first contingent of soldiers to northern Afghanistan on Friday as part of an international effort to help secure the area for the delivery of humanitarian aid.

• Al-Qaida had a formula for making ricin, one of the deadliest known poisons, The Times of London newspaper reported Friday. The Times said it found instructions for making the biological chemical ricin — an untraceable poison that is twice as deadly as cobra venom — in an al-Qaida safehouse in Kabul.



Charles Bennett/Associated Press

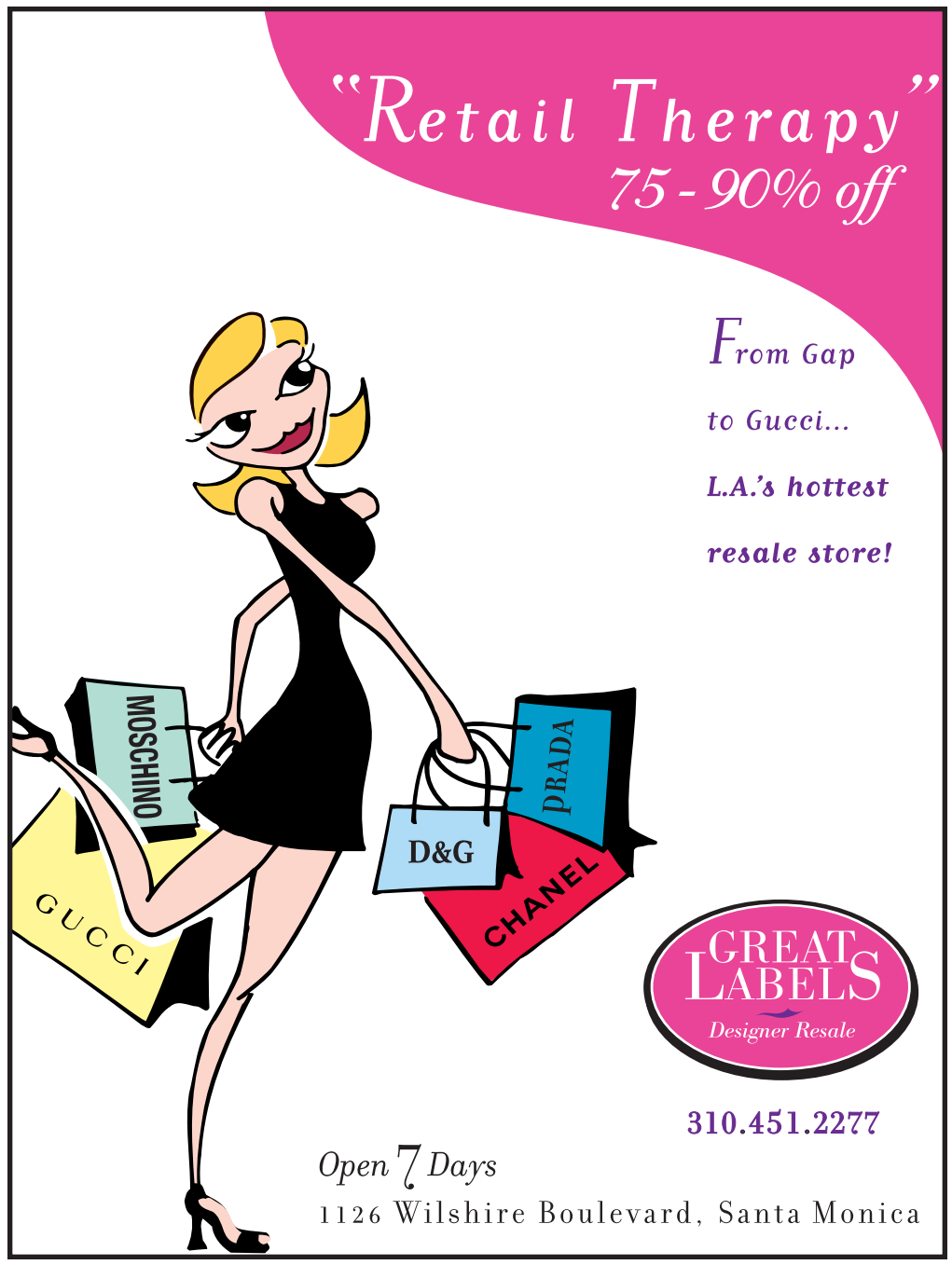
Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld holds a picture of U.S. forces on horseback in Afghanistan, during a news conference at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center in Great Lakes, Ill., Friday. Rumsfeld said U.S. special forces have been involved in ground combat in Afghanistan and no Americans have died or been wounded in the operations.

• Two American women arrested three months ago for preaching Christianity in Afghanistan described their ordeal a day after being rescued by anti-Taliban and U.S. forces in southern Afghanistan. One of the freed women, 24-year-old Heather Mercer, called it a "Hollywood" rescue.

• Five British Muslims have been killed along with scores of other foreign volunteers fighting for the Taliban in northern Afghanistan,

officials of Islamic militant groups said Friday in Islamabad.

• Aides to Afghanistan's former king expressed concern Friday that the northern alliance appeared unwilling to participate in a U.N.-backed meeting to plan a postwar transitional government.



COMICS

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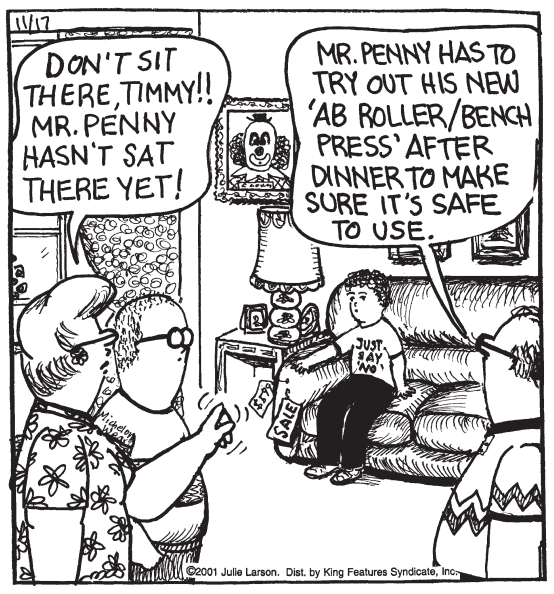

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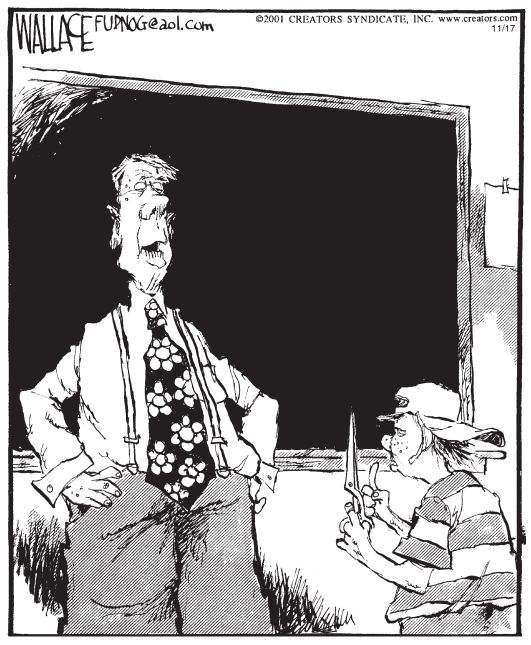

"No, Jenkins, I will not 'lean down' for one second."

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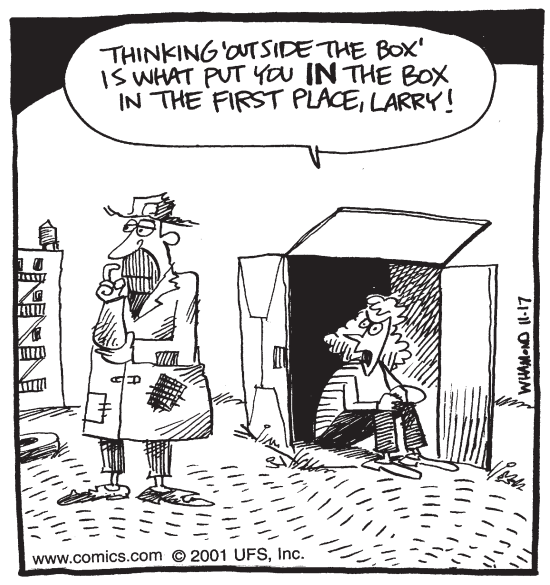

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41 Shovel's cousin
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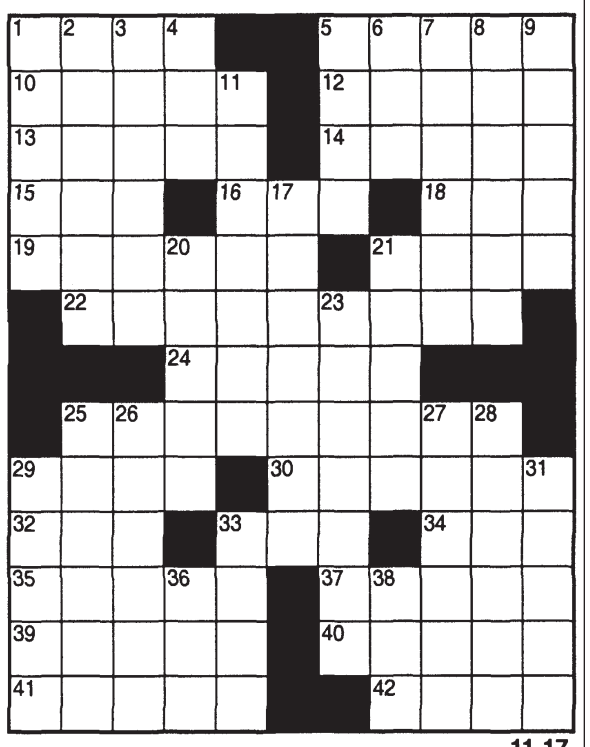
2 Insipid
3 Vacation spot
4 Nursery resident
5 Biting comment
6 Exist
7 Filmed a new version of
8 Cutlery
9 Jazz instruments
11 Mollusks with chambered shells
17 Eyeteeth
20 Stage comment
21 Senior
23 Joins forces
25 Cause to blunder
26 Italian city
27 Store offer
28 Cigar
29 Observes Ramadan
31 Used up
33 Common French verb
36 Crimson
38 Long lunch?

R	A	T	E	S	■	M	O	T	H	S
E	T	H	A	N	■	A	D	H	O	C
C	H	E	R	I	■	L	I	E	T	O
T	E	L	■	F	L	A	N	K	E	R
O	N	A	■	F	E	M	■	I	L	E
R	A	S	P	■	G	U	L	L	S	■
■	■	T	A	P	■	D	E	L	■	■
■	S	C	R	I	P	■	S	I	R	S
B	I	O	■	O	A	F	■	N	U	T
A	P	P	E	N	D	S	■	G	P	A
R	H	O	D	E	■	T	A	M	E	R
G	O	U	G	E	■	O	H	A	R	E
E	N	T	E	R	■	P	A	N	T	S

Yesterday's answer



11-17

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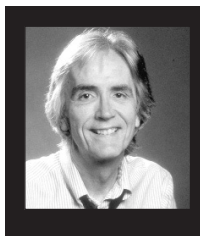

NEWS OF THE WEIRD
by Chuck Shepard

People different from us

• From the police column of the weekly Leonard Graphic (Leonard, Texas, 35 miles north of Dallas), May 3, 2001: "A man claiming to be a medical student was charged with theft of service and given a trespass warning after it was discovered he lied about his reasons for being in the local nursing home two months ago. He told aides there he had permission from the home to 'live the life of the patient' and be bathed and diapered as part of a learning experience. However, when he returned to try the scam again on April 17, police were waiting for him. He was found to be a registered sex offender living in Melissa (Texas)."

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010	Meetings	250	Wanted	600	Services
020	Legal Notices	300	For Rent	650	Health/Beauty
100	Employment	400	Real Estate		

BACK PAGE

Pet ostrich named Godzilla escapes, leading captors on chase through London suburb

By the Associated Press

LONDON — A 6-foot-tall pet ostrich named Godzilla escaped from its owners and led would-be captors a chase through the streets of an English town before trotting home.

Residents of Romford on the eastern edge of London spent nearly two hours Thursday trying to corner the huge bird, some using cars to block its path and others trying to tempt it with bread and grass.

Inspector Steve Hazlewood of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals then arrived at the scene and tried to calm the bird by putting a bag over its head — to no avail.

He said the London Zoo suggested the hood, "but it just flicked it off," he said. "They then suggested getting the vet to sedate it with a dart, but then the owner's son came along and led it home.

"The ostrich must have recognized the boy because it did exactly what he said and went off straight away," Hazlewood said.

Robert Dennington, 35, said he was delivering leaflets with his 14-year-old son, Daniel, when they first spotted the bird.

"A lot of children had just come out of school when the animal escaped, and were very close to it. It could have been lethal."

EMMA NUTBROWN
RSPCA spokeswoman

"I said to Dan, 'Tell me what that is up the road — tell me I'm not seeing things,'" Dennington said.

"He said it was an ostrich, and I said to him: 'Thank you, Dan, I'm not going mad after all.'"

The two, realizing the bird could be dangerous, led it to a closed-off area by tempting it with bread. But when a nearby school ended for the day, curious children gathered around it.

"And for some reason, the ostrich was attracted to the smaller kids and wanted to go after them," Dennington said.

The big birds, which cannot fly, are very dangerous, RSPCA spokeswoman Emma Nutbrown said. "Ostriches have a very, very powerful forward kick and very sharp claws which can cause extremely serious injuries."

"A lot of children had just come out of school when the animal escaped, and were very close to it. It could have been lethal," she said.

Former 'Baywatch' actress charged with cocaine possession

By the Associated Press

ROMULUS, Mich. — Former ``Baywatch'' star Yasmine Bleeth was charged Friday with possession of cocaine.

Bleeth was charged in 34th District Court with two counts of possession of cocaine, a four-year felony, and one count of operating a vehicle under the influence of narcotics, a misdemeanor.

The 33-year-old pleaded innocent and was released on a $10,000 personal bond, police said in a statement. A hearing is set for Nov. 30.

An assistant for Bleeth, agent Larry Taube, said he had no comment on the case.

Bleeth spent the night in jail here after patrol officers found what they suspected was cocaine in her purse during their investigation of a car accident on Sept. 12. Police said Friday's charges also stem from a subsequent search of Bleeth's hotel room.

Police said Bleeth drove off Interstate 94 and onto the freeway's median strip. The other person in the vehicle was a male passenger. Police declined to identify him. No one was injured in the accident.

The 31-year-old passenger is charged with one count of possession of cocaine and being a habitual offender-third offense.

The man was from the Detroit area, and he and Bleeth were in town to visit his relatives, police said.

Bleeth, who lives in Los Angeles, also has appeared in television's ``Nash Bridges.''

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