

Santa Monica Daily Press

A newspaper with issues



NEWS OF THE WEIRD

by Chuck Shepard

For 23 years, Dennis Hope, 55, of Gardnerville, Nev., has operated a business selling people "official" title to land on the moon, Mars and Venus for about \$20 an acre. Although others are in the same business, Hope told the Las Vegas Review-Journal in September that he has earned \$6.5 million during that period (an average of \$270,000 a year). He says his idea was based on something he actually learned in school: that the international Outer Space Treaty of 1967 prohibited nations from owning celestial bodies but was silent about individual ownership. Hope says he wrote to the United Nations, explained his plan, and asked if they had a problem with it (and no one wrote back).



QUOTE OF THE DAY

"In the future, everyone will be famous for 15 minutes."

— Andy Warhol

DID YOU KNOW?:

About 28,000 parking tickets are issued each month in Santa Monica.



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Switchin' it up



Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press

Mark Walberg, of the Game Show Network and actress Doris Roberts, of 'Everyone Loves Raymond,' flip the switch Friday on 'Winterlit,' a holiday lighting display on the Third Street Promenade. Thousands flocked to the Promenade on Friday to take in some shopping and the holiday festivities.

Income disparity between locals higher in resort areas

Santa Monica's one of them

BY GILLIAN FLACCUS

Associated Press Writer

PALM SPRINGS — Graciela Ramirez must choose this year between Christmas presents for her three grandchildren and surgery to repair a painful hernia.

Ramirez has worked for four years at the Casino Spa Resort in downtown Palm Springs, where she spends her days washing the sheets of guests who spend up to \$200 a night to stay there.

Like thousands of other unskilled laborers who live in the Coachella Valley's posh communities, Ramirez struggles to make ends meet on a meager salary in an increasingly expensive resort town where low-income housing is almost nonexistent.

In general, resort communities such as Palm Springs, Santa Monica and Santa Barbara had some of the highest income gaps, as did agricultural areas in the Imperial and Central valleys that rely heavily on immigrant workers.

Ramirez pays \$434 a month for a sub-

dized one-bedroom apartment on the outskirts of Palm Springs, in an area where the average new home goes for \$333,000.

"It's my dream to buy a house," said the 48-year-old Ramirez as she sat in her cramped living room by a plastic Christmas tree. But she figures she would have to take on more work, and "to have two to three jobs just kills you."

A recent analysis of 2000 Census data by The Associated Press found that Palm Springs and the neighboring towns of Cathedral City and Palm Desert have some of the greatest income disparities in California.

The AP ranked 122 towns and cities with populations greater than 1,000 to find out which ones had the greatest income gap between the poorest and richest residents.

People in fast-growing bedroom communities outside San Francisco, Sacramento and Los Angeles overall made about the same amount as their neighbors. Those suburbs have seen explosive growth in the past decade as people try to escape

See INCOME, page 6

SMRR prepares for 2004 elections

Annual meeting results in some changes for city's ruling party

BY JOHN WOOD

Daily Press Staff Writer

Long the ruling party in local politics, the grassroots Santa Monica for Renters Rights group held its annual meeting earlier this month, positioning itself in anticipation of next year's election.

With rent control approaching its 25th year, the liberal organization has largely controlled Santa Monica politics mostly through their highly sought-after endorsements of candidates and ballot measures.

SMRR members agreed at the annual meeting to three bylaw changes aimed at keeping those endorsements from the hands of last-minute campaigners who flood the SMRR meetings with their own supporters.

See SMRR, page 5

Chamber positioning itself for next year's election

By Daily Press staff

Local chamber of commerce officials are quietly gearing up for next year's election by meeting behind closed doors to discuss their strategy for endorsing City Council candidates.

The chamber, which has never endorsed City Council candidates, established this year a political action committee that's charged with finding office seekers for 2004 who will advocate for business owners' interests.

Committee members met last week, but closed off the session from the public and the press. Tom Larmore, a committee member, said the group is just beginning to brainstorm ideas. He asked a reporter to leave before the meeting began so committee members could feel free to discuss their ideas without publicity.

The chamber has for years attempted to protect businesses, but its members frequently butt heads with policy makers in City Hall. The majority of City Council are members of Santa Monica's For Renters Rights, a liberal and powerful political party in the city.

As a result, the chamber's interests don't become priority and are in the minority when it comes to local politics, business owners say.

However, if candidates can be propped up with the help of the chamber's endorsement and fundraising, the organization may be able to put some of its own in office and make some changes in Santa Monica, business owners hope.

Board members plan to establish the process in which to select city council candidates. In the next few months, the political action committee will start looking at other chambers to see how they endorse and raise money for candidates. The committee will then develop its own guidelines about campaigning, raising money and identifying candidates.



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HOROSCOPE

Mystery adds to your allure, Sag



JACQUELINE BIGAR'S STARS

The stars show the kind of day you'll have:

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

HAPPY BIRTHDAY for Saturday, Nov. 29, 2003:

You'll have an exceptional year, when the impossible becomes possible. You might often feel like you are on the roller-coaster ride of your life. What you can count on is the unexpected. Focus on your career, developing a stronger role, if you so choose. Pay raises and promotions are both possible. Others admire your creativity and ingenuity. You often surprise people with your unique approach. Network and expand your horizons, especially in the fall. If you are single, you might decide there is no reason to remain so, especially after September 2004. If you are attached, you'll become much closer through sharing more of your work life together. Your ability to communicate also draws you closer to your sweetie. PISCES pushes your buttons. Don't let him or her.

ARIES (March 21-April 19)
★★★ You might already have gone overboard with all the celebrations. This thought might occur midday, which would be an excellent time to head home and get some extra R and R. You could be put out by a friend who expects way too much from you. Express your boundaries. Tonight: Try being a recluse.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
★★★★★ You might need to put the final touches on shopping or visiting with family. Do everything you can to clear out immediate work. You will want more time for yourself and your friends later. Don't allow someone's grumpiness to get to you. Remember, this person's mood belongs to him or her, not you! Tonight: Where the action is.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20)
★★★★★ Take off if you want and schedule your own minivacation. You could be too exhausted for words. Remember, even happy times take their toll. The further away from the here and now, the happier you will be. Take some mental time off, at least. Tonight: A must show — so you think!

CANCER (June 21-July 22)
★★★★★ Make time for your special sweetie, but also feel free to head in your own direction. You could be overly tired and exhausted. Know when to say enough is enough. Consider a break of pace or doing something totally different. Tonight: Walk the untrodden path.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)
★★★★★ Others seek you out, and your popularity grows. Someone does true confessions and might jolt you to kingdom come. Examine your long-term goals vis-à-vis a relationship. A discussion with a special partner might be needed. Tonight: Dinner for two.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)
★★★ Though yours is a sign associated with doing and serving, you discover that perhaps you have had enough. Head in your own direction, choosing what you need and want. A surprise piece of information might cause you to stop in your tracks. Tonight: Out on the town.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)
★★★★★ Romantic flickers tumble into your weekend. Proceed slowly, knowing what you want. Some of you might decide to go for it, which you will. Find some mistletoe! Still, slow down some and create an easy atmosphere where personal interactions flow. Tonight: Play it low-key.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)
★★★ You might feel obliged to give your family extra attention. Unexpected developments on the home front cause you to stop in your tracks. You like excitement; you've got it. Adjust plans as need be. Tonight: Make time for a little romance.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)
★★★★★ Scatter about and see your loved ones. You might be a bit worn out by the holiday goings-on. Understand when to say "enough" and go off and do your own thing. Take some time just for yourself. You don't have to tell everyone what you are up to! Tonight: Mystery adds to your allure.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)
★★★★★ Expenses go way overboard right now, but who ultimately controls the purse strings? You have no one to blame but yourself. Investigate new possibilities with an eye to tighter control on your budget. Tonight: Find a favorite spot.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)
★★★★★ You're still in the driver's seat. A younger friend seeks you out. He or she wants your attention. Be careful with your unpredictable behavior, if possible. Others often get jolted and back away. Tonight: Keep on smiling. Indulge.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)
★★★★★ If you can, take the daytime as a lazy day to do your thing. Also consider a nap, if possible. Know that very soon you will need every bit of energy possible. Use your sense of humor with an unpredictable Aquarian. Tonight: It's your night to shine.

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LOCAL



COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Youth opera camp to perform 'Brundibar'

By Daily Press staff

"Brundibar," the historically significant opera that was performed many times by Jewish children in Czechoslovakia's Terezin concentration camp during World War II, will be presented Dec. 5 and 7 by the Madison Project Youth Opera Camp of Santa Monica College.

In association with Los Angeles Opera, the Miles Memorial Playhouse in Santa Monica and the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, the opera camp is pushing new boundaries with the opera.

"Brundibar" is a 35-minute children's opera created in 1938 by Czech artists Hans Krasa and Adolf Hofmeister. The piece was performed at the Terezin camp at least 55 times by camp children, including a performance for the International Red Cross inspectors on June 23, 1944. The opera tells the story of a young brother and sister's determination to find enough money to help their sick mother. Eli Villeneuve is the stage director and Daniel Faltus the music director for "Brundibar."

"The kids prevail by working together with other children in the community," said Adam Philipson, Madison Project Opera Camp coordinator. "This is the same experience the opera campers have while working together as an ensemble."

This is the third season that the Madison Project of Santa Monica College has partnered with Los Angeles Opera to train a broad cross-section of young people from throughout the Los Angeles area in voice and performance. Students are taught by Los Angeles Opera professionals and not only get top-notch voice, movement and drama training, but also get a behind-the-scenes visit to the opera company and learn about set design, props, costume and lights.

In addition, the opera camp received a \$35,000 grant from the Dwight Stuart Youth Foundation to cover teachers, production costs, rental of the Miles Memorial Playhouse in Santa Monica for rehearsals and performances, and 30 "need-based" scholarships for under-served and under-represented students. Support also has come from the Jewish Community Foundation, the Stratton-Petit Scholarship Fund, the city of Santa Monica Cultural Affairs Department and the Ambrose Hotel.

Performances are at 7 p.m. Friday, Dec. 5 at the Miles Memorial Playhouse in Christine Reed Park, 1130 Lincoln Blvd., and at 1:30 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 7 at the Museum of Tolerance, 9876 Pico Blvd., Los Angeles. The performance at Miles is limited for both performances.

For information on the Dec. 5 performance, call (310) 434-3431. For information on the Dec. 7 performance at the Museum of Tolerance, call (310) 772-2452.

SMC celebrates Christmas with concert

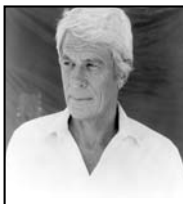
By Daily Press staff

"A Christmas Celebration," an annual holiday concert featuring the Santa Monica College Concert Chorale and other groups on Dec. 6 and 7, will feature special guest Peter Graves, actor and host of A&E's "Biography."

On the program will be works by Johann Sebastian Bach, Gerald Finzi and Daniel Pinkham. Closing the program will be the ever-popular seasonal music with audience sing-along on familiar carols, featuring Graves as guest narrator.

The annual concert features, in addition to the SMC Concert Chorale, the Chancel Choir of the First United Methodist Church, Los Angeles Concert Orchestra, South Bay Children's Choir and Spirit of LA Ringers. The conductor is SMC music professor James Smith.

The suggested donation is \$15 for general admission and \$10 for students and senior citizens. The concert will begin at 7:30 p.m. and the church is located at 1008 11th St. For more information, call (310) 393-8258.



PETER GRAVES



Mediocrity. There is a chance of seeing more W swell as we move through the weekend. Watch the NW wind swell back down over the next couple of days as SW swell offers up minor energy.

OUTLOOK: A small low off of Hawaii could set us up for some waist-high-plus waves over the weekend. And a small SW swell should bring us waist-high bombers as well.

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

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	Morning	Height	Evening	Height	Morning	Height	Evening	Height
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SUNDAY	1:34	1.4	2:55	-1.4	7:51	7.0	9:18	4.4
MONDAY	2:12	1.7	3:44	-1.5	8:30	7.2	10:15	4.1
TUESDAY	2:53	2.1	4:36	-1.5	9:13	7.1	11:17	3.9
WEDNESDAY	3:38	2.4	5:33	-1.2	9:59	6.8	N/A	N/A
THURSDAY	4:31	2.8	6:34	-0.8	12:28	3.8	(10:50)	(6.2)
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LETTERS

Tax proposal creating a division

Editor:

As I sat and listened to the public comments at Thursday's school board meeting two weeks regarding John Deasy's 15 percent tax on all school donations, I was disappointed at what I heard, but not from the parents addressing the board. It was the under the breath, name calling that came from one parent as she listened to those opposed to the plan. This same parent voiced her support of the plan to the board, then sat down and was overheard by many saying "complainer," "whiner," and even "b---h" as parents opposing the tax expressed themselves. It occurred to me then: This tax is not just about the money, it's about a wedge that threatens to divide schools and parents, dismantling this district's already fragile unity. This separation of "us and them" is troubling, and frankly worse than any budget crisis we have faced together.

John Deasy's proposed tax is at best, an ineffective way to create equality, and at its worst, considered by some to be illegal.

As a past PTA president and a five-year term PTA board member, I know how difficult it is to raise money for our schools. On the other hand, I have been extremely encouraged by the culture of giving that is developing throughout our public school system. I think this tax threatens this culture to the very core. We have a unique opportunity to pool our talents and develop solutions to fund programs and services where needed.

First, why not let each school solicit money for a general fund hand-in-hand with their Direct Drive Campaigns? I have seen parents respond generously when specific needs are presented to them in a way that inspires them to give. Let this campaign become part of summer welcome letters and back-to school night presentations. Through the PTA, each school could appoint a liaison to work with the district for corporate and/or local business donations. This district has scores of talented, willing parents who want to help. I am disappointed that the district leadership has not first attempted to satisfy its objective of raising the standards of some of the district's schools by approaching all district parents and businesses directly with a request for funds (I'm not talking about a raffle). Why hasn't a general fund for such a purpose been proposed?

I believe more money would be raised with a direct approach than it will through forcing a tax on already strained budgets and parents. Typically, less than 50 percent of the parent population contributes to the Direct Donation Funds at each school. This is the same group of parents that would be required to donate 15 percent more so their contribution would have the same value to the school as it's had in the past. That's not right.

It wouldn't be right for the Los Angeles County Board of Education to require all 18 districts it oversees to pool their private funds to be redistributed at their discretion. This plan is morally flawed.

I'm not saying I don't want to help. I'm not saying, "I can't" or "I won't." I say, "I can" and "I will" all the time. We give to our schools because there is a need, a value to our children and community, and we feel inspired to support them. We never feel like we owe our schools. We give because we want to help and we want to work with a group of people who are non-judgmental, sincere and working toward a common goal.

There are no easy solutions for creating equality in funding for our schools. Creating a new tax may appear to be a way to bridge financial gaps, but if this system creates a division between the parents and schools within our district, the cost will far outweigh the modest financial benefits.

Lisa Toledo

Webster Elementary School Parent



Member: AAEC, NCS, SCSS

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If they advertise it, we'll most likely buy it



MODERN TIMES

By Lloyd Garver

It's only Thanksgiving week and we're already getting them every day in the mail. Some are expected, some are surprises. Some are big, some are small. No member of the family can resist peeking at them. I'm not talking about holiday gifts. I'm talking about holiday catalogs. Every year, more and more companies send them out in the hope that they can tempt otherwise rational people into making foolish holiday purchases. It takes a strong person to resist. But remember, you're not alone.

By this time of year, it seems like every table and countertop in our house has a stack of catalogs. I understand getting them from places where we've shopped. But we get them from places we didn't

even know existed. We got an entire catalog devoted to chocolate, and another one for popcorn. We got a catalog for female triathletes and one dedicated to leather.

Some of the items in the catalogs don't seem like they would make such great gifts. I don't think it would warm the heart of anyone I know to give them a shrimp de-veiner. Who am I going to give a paper shredder to? I don't know any crooked CEOs. And is there really someone who needs fireplace logs made entirely of used coffee grounds? If they're that desperate for fuel, I could give them a few dozen of my catalogs. What woman could I possibly give a bathing suit to which is made of actual salmon skin? Can you think of one person who would be perfect for a buffalo shaped footstool? And if you give someone that mouthwash dispenser, should you really expect to get a "thank you" note? Who would I give a digital wine thermometer to? I guess somebody who's tired of using his analog wine thermometer.

There are electronic gifts that don't seem right for anybody, either. You can buy a "dog translator" that translates your

dog's barks and other noises into English based on what a Japanese veterinarian thinks the sounds mean. There is also a talking electronic joke-telling device. We're not supposed to worry if nobody thinks the jokes are funny — it comes with a laugh track.

So why do the people who put out these catalogs think that we might buy items at this time of year that we wouldn't even consider purchasing at any other time? Because they know how desperate we can become.

They know that the later it gets, the more nervous we get. They know that we don't really have time to shop for all the people on our lists. They know we have a limited number of ideas for the people we want to give presents to. They know that most of us will get to a point at which we don't care how expensive a gift is or how useless it is. As long as someone else will wrap it and deliver it, we'll buy it.

So, someone will buy that buffalo shaped footstool and that salmon skin bathing suit. But it doesn't have to be you. Ask yourself a few questions before you

make any holiday purchase: 1) Will the person I'm giving this to probably give it away before Jan. 1? 2) Am I just buying it because the holidays have given me a headache? 3) Is this gift supposed to be just as effective whether it's wet or dry? If the answer is "yes" to any these, don't buy it.

I'm not saying it's easy, but we all can do it. If relaxation and holiday self-control don't come easily to you, don't be ashamed to get help. Maybe you can discuss a possible purchase with a friend. You can even buy self-esteem and relaxation cassettes and videos. If you're not sure where to purchase them, I'll bet you can find some in one of those catalogs on the table next to yesterday's mail.

(Lloyd Garver has written for many television shows, ranging from "Sesame Street" to "Family Ties" to "Frasier." He has also read many books, some of them in hardcover. He writes the "Modern Times" column for CBSnews.com's opinion page and can be reached at smdp@lloydgarvermoderntimes.com).

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LOCAL

Rent control law, SMRR turns 25 years old next year

SMRR, from page 1

The endorsements are important because of SMRR's clout as a long-standing political force and its membership base, which fluctuates between 3,000 and 4,000 people a year, treasurer Roger Thornton said.

Before each election, SMRR mails out up to eight "slate" mailers, which list its endorsements for candidates and ballot measures, to targeted groups. The cost of doing that is about \$70,000, making it prohibitive for many independent candidates to successfully campaign against their SMRR-backed opponents.

Five of the seven City Council members are SMRR members, as are many officials on the school, college and other local boards.

The key bylaw change requires new members to sign up 90 days before the election if they want to vote on endorsements. The earlier, 21-day requirement opened up SMRR elections to last-minute members and candidates who would bring in supporters to join SMRR solely to vote for them.

"What we really need is a cooling off period," said SMRR co-chair Denny Zane, a force behind rent control since the 1970s.

Also changed at the annual meeting was a bylaw that requires candidates to receive 55 percent of voter support, rather than the previous 50 percent, and another bylaw that limits voting at SMRR conventions to three rounds. If candidates aren't selected with 55 percent of the vote after three rounds of voting, the 11-member SMRR steering committee can appoint a candidate.

"Obviously, building membership is always good, but when it happens so close to an election it just heightens tension and rivalries unnecessarily," said Zane, adding the bylaw changes will make voting more "natural" and less controlled by last-minute, politically driven membership spikes. "It's more likely that people that are at the convention (will) reflect ongoing membership."

About 70 people attended the annual SMRR meeting at Olympic High School in Ocean Park, also pledging support for Sen. Sheila Kuehl and Assemblywoman Fran Pavley. They also voted in a new steering committee to serve for two years.

Since SMRR was formed in the early 1980s from a coalition of pro-renter groups, it has more often than not secured a majority of seats on the City Council for the candidates it endorses. It has thrown a wrench into the "old" Santa Monica,

"Obviously, building membership is always good, but when it happens so close to an election it just heightens tension and rivalries unnecessarily."

— DENNY ZANE
SMRR co-chair

which Zane described as "the Bahamas for businesses."

"It's not like the old days where the MGM Plaza, which was 1 million square feet, in 1980 was approved without a public hearing and without an (environmental impact report)," Zane said. "It was over the counter."

Zane said the group must continue to adapt as Santa Monica gradually becomes wealthier due to vacancy decontrol, which allows landlords to raise the rent on units when tenants move out. He added that he thinks the organization will have a strong presence for years to come because even new renters benefit from rent control after just a short time living in their units. However, rents — under rent control — do not.

"Santa Monicans are still very liberal," Zane said. "There's no evidence, no reason to think that changes. Santa Monica will still be the anchor of liberal, progressive politics in Southern California in the way that San Francisco is the anchor in northern California."

City Councilman Herb Katz, one of two council members not endorsed by SMRR, said the group will have to adapt in coming years to the changes in Santa Monica and the changes for renters. Katz raised more than \$100,000 to get his name on the November 2000 ballot. His term expires next fall.

"I'm not pro-SMRR or anti-SMRR," he said. "I don't like to see any one group running anything. We talk about it and mean it, that we are independent. The public is saying, 'We can't just have one thing.'"

"When you get real healthy debate, we get real healthy solutions," he added. "When I can walk into a council meeting and be able to tell you how I think they're going to vote ... it's not healthy."

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Long commutes, low pay and living near poverty

INCOME, from page 1

soaring real estate prices closer to the city.

"New suburbs are fairly uniform in terms of income and age," said Dowell Myers, a University of Southern California professor of public policy and planning. "To qualify for the housing, people have to have similar kinds of incomes."

In the Coachella Valley, the division between the rich and poor is as much geographic as it is economic.

The valley, in the arid desert east of Los Angeles, forms a gentle arc that stretches from the extravagant casinos and resorts of Palm Springs and Rancho Mirage to the rutted trailer parks and unincorporated agricultural outposts of Mecca and Thermal.

Within six miles, median household income jumps from \$34,624 in working-class Indio to \$93,986 in Indian Wells, where retirees have flocked in recent years to dozens of gated communities.

Further east in Mecca, immigrant workers pack into unregulated trailer parks on tribal land. The median household income drops to \$22,973, with 98 percent of residents listing themselves as Hispanic on the 2000 Census.

Many of these people commute 30 miles or more to the resort towns to the west, where they work as gardeners, maids or in casinos — but can't afford to live.

"This is a community that's always been thought of as

a leisure community and nobody thinks about who's cutting their grass or taking care of them," said Ivana Krajcinovic, a regional organizer working to unionize workers at the Agua Caliente's Spa Resort Casino in Palm Springs.

"We have people living in garages, people squatting, multiple families living in one apartment."

Jose Rubio, 39, is one of those workers.

He lives with his wife, son and two cousins on tribal land where he pays \$410 a month to rent a space for his one-bedroom trailer. The dirt streets that wind between the 300 mobile homes at the park stink of garbage; the park floods every time it rains and the electricity often shuts off for days, Rubio says.

He, his son and two cousins commute six days a week to Rancho Mirage, where they work as landscapers at \$300,000 homes, office buildings and lush city parks. He makes \$6.75 an hour, sometimes working 12-hour days, and nets about \$12,000 a year.

"The way life is here, you are left with almost nothing," he said.

Ramirez, the casino worker, counts herself lucky to have won a coveted spot two years ago in one of the 21 low-income housing complexes built by the nonprofit Coachella Valley Housing Coalition.

The coalition, based in Indio, has spent \$300 million to develop 1,300 low-income apartments since 1982.

It has helped 800 families build homes in the past decade under a federal "sweat equity" program that allows potential homeowners to make their down payment through labor. Ten thousand families applied for that program, said John Mealey, the coalition's executive director.

The coalition struggles with soaring real estate prices that have crept, over the past five years, east and south along the valley from Palm Springs toward La Quinta, Rancho Mirage and Indio.

"Palm Springs is pretty much built up, so the action has moved to the center of the valley," said Mealey, who fears that eventually even workers in hardscrabble Coachella and Mecca will be priced out.

"The complexion of these communities is going to change and the politics are going to change. It's almost like the changes are happening overnight."

La Quinta, once a working-class town in the mid-valley, now boasts gated communities with \$300,000 homes, country clubs and polo ranches.

Voters there recently rejected funds for a new community swimming pool in the town's old core, called the Cove. In the past two elections, voters have turned down tax increases for the local fire department, Mealey said.

"Those resort industries wouldn't exist if the folks in the Coachella Valley didn't live and work here," said Nadia Villagran, special projects manager for the housing coalition. "And I don't think people are even aware of that."

Families of troops head to Baghdad on peace mission

BY MICHELLE MORGANTE

Associated Press Writer

SAN DIEGO — Michael Lopercio is going to Iraq to hear for himself how ordinary Iraqis feel about the war. Anabelle Valencia hopes to see her son and daughter who are Army soldiers. Fernando Suarez del Solar wants to touch the earth where his son was killed.

On Saturday, each will leave their hometowns to join other American parents and wives of military personnel serving in Iraq, a small delegation bearing a message of friendship for the people of Baghdad.

"A mission of peace, that is what we are trying to do," said Suarez del Solar, whose son, Marine Lance Cpl. Jesus Suarez del Solar, was killed in Iraq eight months ago. "The

idea is that the people of Iraq understand that we are not their enemies, that we are also suffering in this war."

The 10-member group intends to meet Iraqi civilians and political leaders as well as U.S. troops and see firsthand the faraway conflict that is altering their lives at home.

"I have been very confused about what is going on. ... You hear lots of conflicting, crossed messages from the (Bush) administration and the news reports," said Lopercio, a restaurant owner from Tempe, Ariz., whose son, Anthony, is an Army fueling specialist.

Lopercio, 51, said he wants to talk to "average, everyday Iraqis. ... How they feel will ultimately dictate our success or failure there."

The journey, which will have the group meet in Amsterdam, fly to Jordan, and then drive into Iraq, was

inspired by Suarez del Solar, a San Diego County small-business manager who became an anti-war activist after his 20-year-old son died on March 27 when he stepped on an unexploded U.S. cluster bombshell south of Baghdad.

Suarez del Solar, who has toured the United States speaking against the war, caught the attention of Medea Benjamin, director of the San Francisco group Global Exchange. Over the past two months, they pulled together other parents and family members willing to travel to Iraq.

The group includes two wives of soldiers based at Fort Bragg, N.C., and four veterans of the Vietnam and Gulf wars, including two who have children deployed in Iraq.

"What we have in common is that we think that the Bush administration has got us into quite a mess in Iraq and we want to help find a solution that will both be positive for the U.S. troops and the Iraqis," Benjamin said.

The delegation, she said, wants "to get a better understanding of what is happening on the ground, and to use that understanding when we come back to put pressure on the U.S. government and the United Nations ... to bring the troops home."

They plan to hold a news conference in Washington upon their return Dec. 9 and later meet with U.N. officials in New York.

The group raised donations to pay for the trip. Benjamin said no special government permission was needed, but 25 members of Congress — Republicans and Democrats — wrote letters of support.

The greatest challenge in organizing the trip, she said, was a sense that U.S. soldiers whose loved ones wished to join them and express opposition to the operation were being punished by commanding officers. One woman, whom she did not name, dropped out after her Army reservist husband was reassigned to a more difficult job with restricted access to phone calls and e-mail. Two other wives dropped out after their husbands heard negative reactions from their commanders, she said.

In Baghdad, coalition spokesman Sgt. Danny Martin said he had not heard of such repercussions.

"Honestly, it would be to the commander's discretion," he said. "I wouldn't know if there's any sort of protocol in place that would have a soldier reassigned."

While Martin expressed concern about the safety of the delegation, and for all people in Iraq, he said their effort would be appreciated.

"I support the military and everything we're doing here," he said. "If they can actually produce something positive from their trip, by all means, I'd love to have them here. Any assistance in keeping the entire nation stable and peaceful and secure is more than welcome."

Suarez del Solar, a 48-year-old native of Toluca, Mexico, will carry nearly 2,000 letters written by U.S. and Mexican students that he gathered through an



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STATE



In Oakland, budding medical marijuana clubs may spur regulations

BY BETH FOUHY
Associated Press Writer

OAKLAND — If there's an epicenter of the nation's medical marijuana movement, it may be right here in a gritty six-block area near City Hall, where at least eleven dispensaries sell pot to any California resident with a doctor's note.

Some of the people who use pot to ease symptoms of AIDS, cancer and other illnesses leave quickly, tucking small bags of the drug into their purse or pockets. Others stay at the clubs, where pot smoke occasionally wafts into the street, earning the neighborhood the nickname Oaksterdam, after the freewheeling Dutch capital where marijuana use has been decriminalized.

While federal law prohibits the use or sale of marijuana for any reason, nine states including California permit the use of marijuana for medical purposes. Since voters approved a state ballot measure legalizing medical marijuana in 1996, "pot clubs" have popped up in California cities including San Francisco, Hayward, Los Angeles and Santa Cruz. But nowhere is their concentration as high as Oakland, leading some residents of this famously tolerant city of 400,000 to wonder whether the proliferation of clubs has gone too far.

The Oaksterdam neighborhood is gentrifying, and most businesses in the immediate area have welcomed the pot clubs, saying they've helped the local economy.

But the City Council is set to vote as early as next week on several proposed restrictions, after complaints from some business owners about problems ranging from the smoke to an escalation of street violence.

Armed robbers recently tied up a bouncer outside one club and fled with pot and a significant amount of cash. It was the last straw for a gay and lesbian youth center next door — its director decided to move the center.

That the council would consider any restrictions on the clubs is a striking departure from the past.

In 1998, the city enacted what many advocates consider the most sweeping protection of medical marijuana use in the country, allowing patients to possess 24 times the amount of pot permitted under state law, and deputizing operators of a cannabis collective as "officers of the city," a title that confers some protection from local police enforcement. With the Oaksterdam area's relatively cheap rent and access to public transportation, the policy made Oakland a magnet for distributors.

Now the council is considering a requirement that clubs carry business licenses, or zoning rules that would limit the concentration of clubs in an area. The city's far-reaching anti-smoking ordinance, which prohibits smoking in any commercial building unless it has a separate ventilation system, will likely be applied to the clubs as well.

Peace activists lash out at American policy in Iraq

PEACE, from page 6

Internet campaign. He intends to deliver the letters to Iraqi schoolchildren.

Many of the letters are directed to soldiers, asking them to take care of themselves and return home safely as soon as possible, he said. One 10-year-old girl from Watsonville asked forgiveness from the Iraqi children who have lost parents in the war.

Suarez del Solar plans to take dirt from the site where his son died and use it to plant a tree as a symbol of peace near the Marine's grave in Escondido.

Valencia, a 48-year-old high school teaching assistant in Tucson, Ariz., said her family is worried about her safety, but she is determined to go.

"I want to see what is happening there myself, not that they tell me that I see it with my own eyes," she said Wednesday as she packed.

"I didn't want a war to come. When it came, I supported the troops. But now it is time for this to end. Enough already with all of these deaths. Why are they killing our children?"

Sean Dougherty, a Vietnam veteran and merchant marine from Alaska, said he told his daughter, a 24-year-old medic, not to

attempt traveling to Baghdad to see him.

"I told her 'No. Absolutely not. ... All I need to do is put you in harm's way. If you got maimed or killed I couldn't live with myself.'"

He said he'd urged his daughter not to enlist in the service, but that she did so to pay for her education.

Dougherty said he's never believed President Bush presented a valid reason for going to war, a move he blamed on "warmongering profiteers."

Lopercio said his oldest son joined the Army shortly before the Sept. 11 terror attacks. "I think he was just looking for some direction and he felt excited about the (recruitment) posters and the educational opportunity."

The 23-year-old private based at Fort Riley, Kansas, is on his second deployment to Iraq, having had just two months at home before the family learned he was being shipped out again.

"This is a nightmare, it's just a nightmare," Lopercio said. "He's got two years left in the service and I'm visualizing that he may spend two years in the most dangerous place on Earth."

"It just doesn't match up with the recruiting poster does it?"

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Bargain shoppers seek early bird specials

BY ANNE D'INNOCENZIO

AP Business Writer

Merchants were full of good cheer Friday as they got a feel for consumers on the official opening of the holiday shopping season: They're buying as least as much as last year, and many are even paying retail.

Early-bird specials on TVs and DVD players and hot toys like Bratz and Barbies wooed many to the nation's malls and stores. But some retail executives said shoppers also were buying regular-priced goods, a stark difference from last year, when consumers stuck to bargain-hunting.

There were scattered outbreaks of holiday-shopping craziness. When the doors of a Wal-Mart store in Marietta, Ga., opened at 6 a.m., hundreds of people jammed inside, some losing their shoes, others running at full speed with their carts to stake a claim to discounted items.

"It was an adrenaline rush," said Imbia Barry, who lost her scarf in the crowd.

Barry, who arrived at 3:30 a.m., bought two HP Pavilion desktop computers with 17-inch monitors for \$498 apiece, one for her grandmother and one for her daughter. She said they normally cost about \$800. She also picked up a DVD player for her daughter for \$29.96.

With the economy on the rebound, the labor market improving and consumer confidence on the rise, merchants like Sears, Roebuck and Co., office supplies retailer Staples, K-B Toys, and several major mall operators reported that traffic and business as of Friday afternoon were at least as healthy as a year ago.

The big question is whether consumers will keep spending throughout the season.

Last year's holiday sales were mediocre despite strong Thanksgiving weekend sales. Consumers, spooked by the prospect of war in Iraq and a spate of corporate layoffs, delayed the rest of their buying until the very end of the season to get the best bargains.

"Sales and traffic on Friday are better than last year, and that's encouraging," said Walter Loeb, an analyst with Loeb Associates in New York who talked to store executives Friday. "There will be a slight slowdown, but in general I think the momentum will be better than a year ago."

Wally Brewster, a spokesman at General Growth Properties, which owns and manages 166 malls in 39 states, said business Friday was up from a year ago by a percentage in the high single digits.

Some retailers — particularly department stores and apparel merchants like Bloomingdale's and Bergdorf Goodman — plan to be stingier with markdowns

than in the past, a strategy many analysts don't think will last. Merchants are counting on consumers to be so pleased with new services and exclusive merchandise that they'll be willing to pay full price.

Karen MacDonald, a spokeswoman at Bloomfield Hills, Mich.-based Taubman Centers, which owns or manages 31 shopping centers in 13 states, said sales and traffic were better than a year ago, and that there was "plenty of full-price selling."

Still, there's nothing like a sale to draw a crowd.

About 500 people stood in line early Friday outside a Best Buy in Coralville, Iowa. Bargains included \$299 digital camcorders and \$999.99 high-definition, flat-screen TV monitors.

Matt Van Berkum of North English, Iowa, said he had been there since 3 a.m. and planned to buy a home theater system for his apartment for about \$500. "I've never done this before, but I'm hoping to get a good deal," he said.

Duane Carbine of Phoenix also had an eye for a sale. He said he did most of his shopping online Thursday night, then kept to a strict budget to buy a cartload of toys for his three children at Toys "R" Us.

"I've probably just saved \$400. You just have to," Carbine said. "By doing it this way, I've saved a car payment."

Retailers still have plenty to worry about — especially an unemployment rate that remains at 6 percent.

Sally Sanchez, 47, of Lakewood, Colo., said she is cutting back this holiday season after being out of work for seven months.

"We're going to have a good Christmas. It just won't be extravagant," said Sanchez, who was shopping at a local Kmart.

Stores have steeled themselves for a shopping letdown, with inventories that average 7 percent below last year's levels.

No must-have item has emerged this season, although the best sellers in toys include Fisher-Price's Hokey Pokey Elmo, Spin Master's Mighty Beanz collectible plastic toys, MGA Entertainment's Bratz dolls and Mattel's Hot Wheels T-Wrecks playset.

Michael Niemira, vice president of Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi Ltd., predicted a sales gain of 4.5 percent for the November-December period, the best performance since 1999, when the tally rose 5.4 percent. He based the estimate on sales from stores open at least a year, considered the best indicator of a retailer's health.

Last holiday season's results were unchanged from 2001.

The Washington-based National Retail Federation projected total holiday sales to rise 5.7 percent to \$217.4 billion.



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NATIONAL



Sunday a.m. showdown: sports versus church

BY WAYNE PARRY
Associated Press Writer

SUMMIT, N.J. — Sports vs. church: It's become the Sunday morning dilemma in homes across the nation.

With weekend sports leagues growing in popularity, schedules have stretched further into those hours that were once the exclusive domain of churches.

Now, clergy of many faiths are pushing back, asking coaches and time-starved parents to keep Sunday morning holy, even if it means their children's teams have to play some other time.

"I don't want my kids to grow up with great football memories and no Biblical knowledge," said Rev. Chuck Rush, senior minister at Christ Church in Summit, a New York City suburb. "You've got this dramatic pressure between playing sports and going to church, which isn't good."

The Summit Interfaith Council recently issued an appeal to public and private sports leagues to refrain from scheduling games before noon on Sunday.

Rush, who helped write the appeal, sees the church vs. sports conflict in his own home. His 13-year-old daughter, who plays soccer, is sometimes torn between religion and her loyalty to her team, where she stood a good chance of being named most valuable player.

"She was in a tournament recently and she said, 'I could be the MVP, but if I don't play in this Sunday's game, I definitely won't be the MVP,'" he recalled.

It all boils down to time, and the precious lack of it for families. As the growing demands of homework, weekend errands and sports compete for families' free time, church often loses.

One church in Andover, Mass., recently conducted a marketing survey to find out when congregants had time to attend weekend services. The most common response: Saturday at 5 p.m., because Sunday was all but booked.

"You run around all week long, commuting to work and coming home, and run and run all weekend long and by Sunday night, you're asking, 'What the

heck just happened?'" Rush said. "Sabbath means there's some structured rest."

But stacking games on Saturday isn't the answer for everyone. Those games inconvenience Jewish families, who sympathize with the churches' problem but would prefer their kids play on Sunday.

"Having games on Saturday morning is a huge challenge for the Jewish community," said Allyson Gall, New Jersey Director for the American Jewish Committee in nearby Millburn. "I'd try like crazy to get the kids to an 8 a.m. game, have them change clothes in the car on the way back and rush them to synagogue."

At St. Teresa of Avila R.C. Church in Summit, it's not uncommon to see youngsters in the pews dressed in soccer or football uniforms, ready to be whisked off to the field as soon as the last organ note fades.

Don Rasweiler, a father of five and a football coach, must deal with both sides of the debate. He has to be at the field an hour before the 10:30 a.m. game, which means getting at least some of the kids up early enough for 7:30 a.m. Mass. There's also a good chance one or two of his other children will have a game later in the day.

Rasweiler and his wife Kate frequently handle it by splitting up, attending different Masses with Jack, 12, Henry, 10, or Abigail, 8, depending on the week's sports schedule.

Rasweiler said his wife isn't pleased with the solution.

"We were discussing it a couple weekends ago, and she said, 'I don't like the effect this is having on us. We should go to church as a family.'"

Tom Brown, a baseball coach and St. Teresa parishioner, noted his league worked with the area churches to at least avoid conflicts between team picture day and the congregations' First Holy Communion days.

"We talked to them, got their dates, and we moved picture day," he said. "They really appreciated it, and we got a big thank you from the churches and the parents."

Strong ski season coming

BY ROBERT WELLER
Associated Press Writer

VAIL, Colo. — The powder is already deep on Vail's double-diamond run Prima and at many other Western ski resorts, raising hopes of another boom year for the industry after 2002's record season.

Most resorts opened early in Utah, which led the nation with more than 100 inches of snow by Thanksgiving.

"We could not ask for anything more this year," said Kip Pitou, president of Ski Utah.

The snow that blanketed Utah also helped out elsewhere. Powderhorn in western Colorado opened for the Thanksgiving weekend for the first time in more than 20 years, while Mount Spokane in Washington was open for the first time in seven years.

Last year, the U.S. ski industry reported a record 57.6 million skier visits. A skier visit represents the purchase and use

of a lift ticket by a skier or snowboarder.

But executives were more nervous this season with the industry facing increasing competition for the leisure dollar. Even cruise lines are offering cheap deals in prime ski markets, and last-minute Internet bookings are making resort management more complicated.

Vail Resorts recently posted its first fiscal year net loss in a decade, blaming the effect of the war in Iraq on travel.

Bill Jensen, chief operating officer for Vail Mountain, the nation's busiest resort, and others are hoping a weaker U.S. dollar, good snow for a second straight year, an improving economy and fewer air travel problems will mean more visitors.

Mammoth Mountain in California celebrated its 50th season with a new gondola at the resort's new base village. Snowriders can now check e-mail on the lift at Lake Tahoe's Squaw Valley, which installed a wireless network in the offseason.

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NATIONAL

Youthful marijuana use not the stigma it used to be

BY CONNIE CASS

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — When it comes to marijuana, youthful indiscretion has come of age.

Lots of politicians, including three of the Democratic presidential candidates, show no fear of fessing up to lighting up in their wild-oats days. Indeed, some who deny dabbling in illegal drugs give the impression that instead of feeling self-righteous, they're a little nervous about coming across as dishonest or just square.

Times have changed since one of President Reagan's Supreme Court nominees was jettisoned because of pot smoking in his past, and even over the decade since candidate Bill Clinton felt obliged to equivocate about whether he inhaled.

"We're just facing reality. People do a lot of things when they're young," said Joseph Califano, chairman of Columbia University's National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse and a former U.S. health secretary.

As young people who were part of the explosion in drug use in the 1970s matured and moved into public service, voters of all ages gradually have become more accepting of drug transgressions.

In addition to former President Clinton, former Vice President Al Gore, Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., and several past senators and Cabinet secretaries have admitted to at least trying marijuana. New York Gov. George Pataki says he inhaled, as did New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

Character was a big issue in movie star Arnold Schwarzenegger's election to California governor, but film of him smoking pot back in his bodybuilder days was not. President Bush, who speaks in broad terms about overcoming a drinking problem, refuses to answer specific questions about his past behavior.

Eight candidates at a recent Democratic presidential debate were asked whether they ever had used marijuana. Three of them — Sen. John Kerry, Sen. John Edwards and Howard Dean — each answered with an unadorned "yes," drawing enthusiastic applause from the "Rock the Vote" event's youthful audience. It was candidates who said they hadn't smoked pot who felt the need to elaborate.

"I grew up in the church. We didn't

believe in that," Al Sharpton explained.

Rep. Dennis Kucinich said he never tried marijuana, "but I think it ought to be decriminalized."

Sen. Joseph Lieberman offered a joking apology: "Well, you know, I have a reputation for giving unpopular answers in Democratic debates. I never used marijuana, sorry."

Only Wesley Clark offered a straightforward, "Never used it."

The candidates' admissions caused barely a ripple in the media, launched no significant Republican attacks and no signs of public outrage. But conservative moralist Bill Bennett, co-chairman of Partnership for a Drug-Free America, said he was disappointed by "this kind of tee-hee, ha ha, winking and nodding at marijuana."

"It's not a lighthearted issue. It's a serious issue," said Bennett, who served as director of drug control policy under the first President Bush. "They wouldn't joke like this about smoking cigarettes."

It was Bennett, as Ronald Reagan's education secretary back in 1987, who pushed Douglas Ginsburg to give up his Supreme Court nomination. While Bennett says past marijuana use should not automatically bar an individual from high office, he still believes Ginsburg's use of the illegal substance while a serving as a Harvard law professor made him unfit.

Advocates of marijuana, who have had some success promoting medical use of the drug, are encouraged by the more casual attitude, even though most of the politicians who tried marijuana years ago don't support legalization today.

"Given the fact that we have so many prominent people in this country who have acknowledged using marijuana and didn't become junkies, derelicts, have their lives ruined, we are at a point where we need to have a conversation about do these laws that criminalize marijuana make any sense," said Bruce Mirken, spokesman for the Marijuana Policy Project, which seeks to ease marijuana laws.

For parents, the proliferation of "everybody did it" excuses among the nation's leaders raises the question of how to convince teenagers that marijuana is risky. After all, Partnership for a Drug-Free America estimates that about 60 percent of parents have tried marijuana themselves.

Bennett recommends describing the dangers honestly, in the same vein as warning against speeding or drunk driving.

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WORLD BRIEFLY

Palestinians erupt with anger

By The Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel — Palestinians reacted with anger at Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's warning that Israel might seize land if peace negotiations fail, though Sharon also said Israel must give up territory for peace.

"You do not have unlimited time," Sharon told a news conference on Thursday, addressing the Palestinians, adding that if he feels the Palestinians are not serious about negotiating a peace deal, he may take unilateral steps. "Maybe (the Palestinians) can get things now that they won't be able to get then," he said.

The Palestinians, who claim all of the West Bank and Gaza Strip for a state, responded to Sharon's warning of impatience and annexation with a sharp rebuke.

"This is an unprecedented, arrogant statement. It is rude and it lacks any vision," Palestinian Foreign Minister Nabil Shaath said. "He should declare that he is committed to the 'road map' and implement all the Israeli commitments that are in this map," referring to a U.S.-backed peace plan.

Fighting continues in Afghanistan

By The Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Scattered fighting in Afghanistan over the Eid-al-Fitr holiday slightly wounded three coalition fighters, including two American soldiers, and one pro-Taliban militant, the U.S. military said Friday.

American and Afghan soldiers launched a special anti-terrorist operation dubbed Mountain Resolve on Nov. 7 in two eastern provinces of snow-covered mountains bordering Pakistan: Nuristan and Kunar. On Wednesday afternoon, anti-coalition forces were targeted by a bomb and small arms fire there, U.S. military spokesman Maj. Bryan Hilferty said at Bagram Air Base.

He did not give a location.

U.S. soldiers and troops with the Afghan national army returned fire, and one Afghan national army soldier was wounded and evacuated. Two U.S. soldiers were slightly wounded and later returned to duty, Hilferty said.

On Wednesday near the Khost fire base, anti-coali-

tion militia forces fired on coalition and Afghan soldiers, which returned fire, wounding one enemy soldier and capturing several others, Hilferty said. The wounded man was evacuated.

Billion-dollar trade sanctions on hold

By The Associated Press

GENEVA — The European Union and its allies have agreed to a nine-day delay before imposing billions of dollars in trade sanctions against the United States over illegal steel tariffs, World Trade Organization officials said Friday.

The EU, Japan and Norway had threatened to impose import duties on U.S. goods beginning Dec. 6 unless Washington dropped tariffs of up to 30 percent on imported steel.

But trade organization officials said Friday that all the countries involved agreed to delay imposing the retaliatory tariffs until Dec. 15.

A WTO appeals panel on Nov. 10 upheld an earlier WTO decision that said the U.S. duties violated the trade organization's rules.

The 15-nation EU has threatened tariffs on \$2.2 billion worth of U.S. imports ranging from orange juice to pajamas unless the duties are removed immediately. The Norwegian government has threatened 30 percent duties on roughly \$12 million worth of American imports, while Japan planned around \$98 million of imports duties, according to Kyodo News.

President Bush's administration says the tariffs imposed last year are needed to bolster the beleaguered U.S. steel industry. Steel-producing states in the midwestern United States are lobbying to keep the duties, while big U.S. steel consumers, like automakers, however, demand their removal.

Highway a familiar sight for shootings

By The Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — More people have reported shots possibly being fired at vehicles along the same stretch of highway where a woman was killed when a bullet penetrated a car door, including one shooting confirmed by authorities Thursday.

Authorities were investigating 10 shootings on or near a stretch of Interstate 270, the highway that circles Columbus, said Franklin County Sheriff's Chief Deputy Steve Martin.

Extra police were sent to patrol the area Thursday.

The first shooting was reported in May and others had come in the past 6 1/2 weeks in the area just south of Columbus. Tuesday's killing of Gail Knisley, 62, made a total of nine shootings.

Since the killing, Martin said Thursday, several other people have reported that their vehicles may have been hit by bullets along I-270.

Martin said authorities do not have any definite physical evidence to show that all the cases are linked and said he is "not ready" to say if the shots have been fired by a sniper.

The sparsely populated area includes woods frequented by hunters and people practicing target shooting, along with industrial sites and some suburban neighborhoods.

Lack of ammo a planned strategy

By The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Soldiers with the Army's 3rd Infantry Division charged into Iraq in April short of the ammunition their commanders had said was necessary to invade, according to the division's postwar evaluation of the fighting.

It was one of a number of supply problems encountered by the 3rd Infantry before and during its 21-day dash to Baghdad from Kuwait, according to the internal review, a 293-page after-action report created by the division's senior officers and troops.

During the run-up to the war, division commanders requested additional ammunition be delivered to front-line units. The request was approved, but the troops could not obtain all the ordnance despite months of war preparations.

The report, whose authors were not identified by name, catalogued serious problems with supply, security and the handling of prisoners of war. It blamed many problems on higher headquarters or other parts of the military, although it did point out some places where the division could train its own soldiers better.

A spokesman for the division, Maj. Darryl Wright, characterized the report as a candid effort to pinpoint problems and refine tactics so the division fights better next time. He said the report, obtained by The Associated Press and other outlets, had not yet been finalized.

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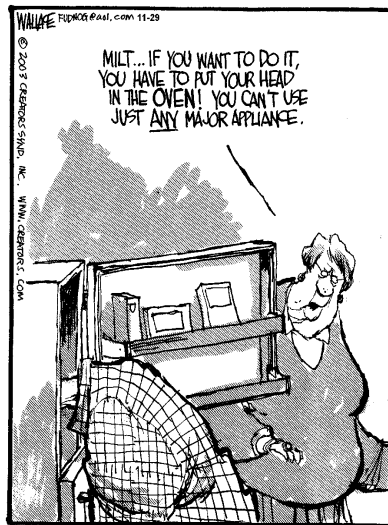
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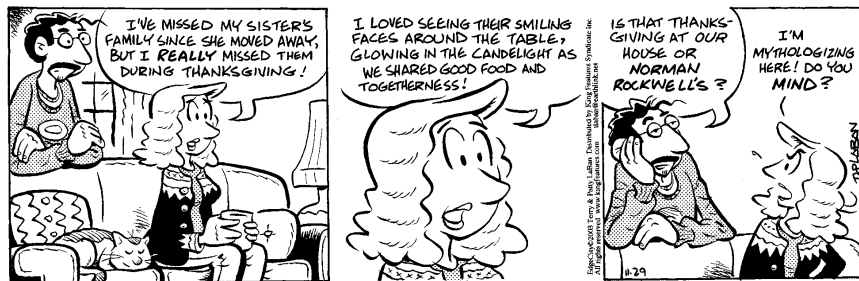


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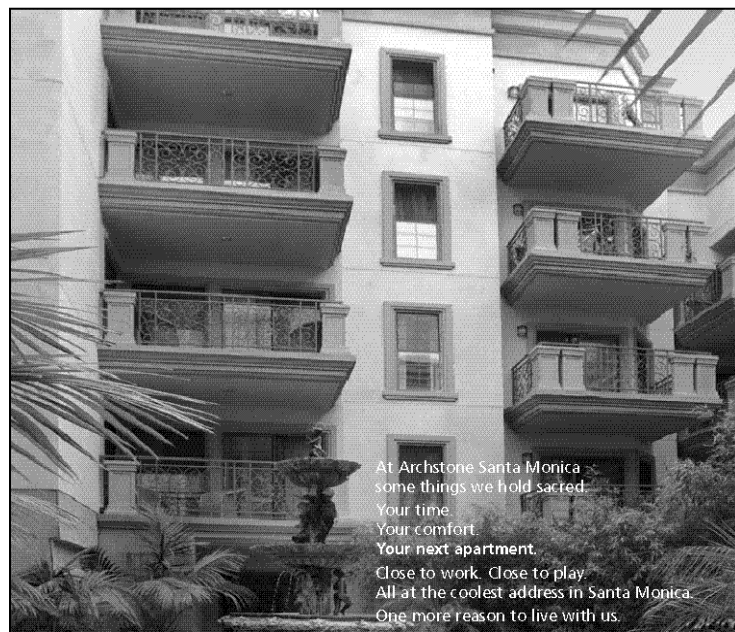
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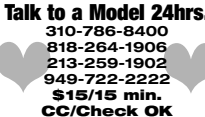


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BACK PAGE

The tax man comes after pop singer Peabo Bryson

By The Associated Press

ATLANTA — The Internal Revenue Service will seek to recover more than \$1 million in back taxes that pop and R&B star Peabo Bryson owes by auctioning off some of his belongings, ranging from Grammy Awards to dishware.

"We are having the auction to reduce his tax debt," said Keith Hilava, a property appraisal and liquidation specialist for the IRS.

The first portion of the Dec. 5-6 auction will focus on electronic and recording equipment. The second day will be devoted to Bryson's personal items, including a grand piano, a signed copy of Nelson Mandela's "Long Walk to Freedom," several bottles of expensive wine, a closet full of designer suits and several gold and platinum records.

"I am expecting a good crowd," Hilava said. "How much we sell and what we sell it for will depend on the people buying. It depends on the market."

Hilava, who has been doing sales for the IRS for 25 years, said celebrity auctions often attract curiosity seekers.

Bryson, 52, is a writer, singer and producer with nine gold albums. He won a Grammy in 1992 for his recording of "Beauty and the Beast" with Celine Dion and another in 1993 for "A Whole New World" with Regina Belle. He's also recorded duets with Roberta Flack and Natalie Cole.

In 1989, he paid \$1.2 million in taxes to settle a lien the IRS placed on his home.

On Aug. 21, the IRS seized property from Bryson's Buckhead mansion. According to a lien on file at the Fulton County Courthouse, he owed the IRS \$1.2 million as of 2000.

LONDON — Soccer star turned actor Vinnie Jones was charged by police Friday over an alleged incident of "air rage."

The 38-year-old star of the 1998 comedy thriller "Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels" was traveling in the first class cabin of a Virgin Atlantic plane from Heathrow to Tokyo on June 1 when the incident is alleged to have taken place.

London's Metropolitan Police said Jones had been charged with "being drunk on an aircraft, using threatening abusive or insulting words, and common assault on a passenger." Jones, who faces a court appearance Monday, refused comment.

In his professional career playing for Wimbledon and Wales, Jones was mainly known as a "hard man" for his rough tackling and aggressive play.

INGLEWOOD — Joe Pesci had more to celebrate than just Thanksgiving, as a horse named after the actor romped to an 8 1/2-length victory at Hollywood Park.

Pesci, a 3-year-old filly making her first start, was entered Thursday in a six furlong race for maidens. She paid \$3, \$2.10 and \$2.10.

The two-legged Pesci, who co-owns the horse with trainer Wesley Ward, was pleased about the win.

"What can I say, I'm stuffed," he said.

The 60-year-old, who won an Oscar for his supporting role in "GoodFellas," has been a horse racing fan for years, but his namesake represents his first ownership experience. It appears he got off on the right hoof.

"We watched her run in the morning and she's so calm, so big, we were pretty confident," Pesci said.

SACRAMENTO — Maria Shriver says she's still trying to figure out how to juggle her roles as California's first lady, a television journalist and a mother.

"I have no clue how I'll fit all these pieces of my life together," Shriver said.

She is no newcomer to the world of politics: Her father, R. Sargent Shriver, was the Democratic Party's 1972 nominee for vice president, and one of her uncles

was President Kennedy.

But her marriage to Arnold Schwarzenegger, an internationally known movie star turned Republican governor, has put her in an entirely new role. She made her first solo appearance as first lady Wednesday at a Sacramento food bank.

Democratic legislators have criticized Schwarzenegger's proposal for reversing the state's budget crisis, saying the cuts would hit some of the state's most vulnerable populations.

Shriver, who returned part-time to her job with NBC News last week, said she's "not involved in the politics of the Legislature and my husband. Does my heart go out to families that struggle? Yes. I'm a big believer that all of us can make a difference in those people's lives."

TAIPEI, Taiwan — When pop star Michael Jackson performed in Taiwan's second-largest city in 1996, the mayor gave him a meritorious achievement award, a move that infuriated some politicians.

Although Jackson has been arrested on child molestation charges in California, the politician who gave the award to the singer said he has no regrets.

"We were only honoring his artistic achievements," said former Kaohsiung Mayor Wu Den-yih, now an opposition member of parliament.

"We weren't honoring him for his morals," Wu said. "We kept the two things separate."

The singer has said on his new Web site that the allegations are "predicated on a big lie" and that he will be exonerated in court.

Two city councilors said they objected to Jackson's award because of earlier allegations the singer had improper relations with children. The allegations never led to criminal charges and in 1994 the investigation became inactive.

Jackson had maintained his innocence but reportedly paid a multimillion-dollar civil settlement.

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