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Too many students in the schools

Santa Monica schools are overcrowded, but officials have a plan to cut back

BY ANDREW H. FIXMER

Special to the Daily Press

The Santa Monica public education system has become a victim of its own success.

Most of the schools in the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District are bursting at the seams and school officials plan to cut the amount of students that are enrolled in the system.

School officials say that because the quality of education in the school district continues to improve, parents are pulling their children out of private schools and opting for public education.

The increased enrollment from local students, combined with the traditional high number of out-of-district permits granted by the school board, has led to over-

crowded classrooms. The school district administration has prepared a plan, which will be presented at next week's school board meeting, to drastically reduce enrollment.

"We need to wrestle with the financial implications of reducing the number of students in the district," said John Deasy, superintendent of schools. "We have taken a close look at where cuts can be made and at the financial impact a reduced enrollment will have."

See SCHOOLS, page 3



Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press

Carlos Lopez, from Sun Valley, Idaho-based Stern Dahl Enterprises, cuts a new crosswalk on Montana Avenue as part of the city's pedestrian improvement plan.

It's a two-way street for cars and pedestrians

Speed not always the factor in accidents, cops say

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON

Daily Press Staff Writer

Travelers along Montana Avenue had better pay attention, or it may end up costing you your life or someone else's.

A pedestrian spent five days in the hospital in serious condition after a motorist, identified as Barbara Billingsley, hit her while she was walking in a crosswalk at the intersection of Montana Avenue and 10th Street on Nov. 17. The victim has been released from an area hospital and is recuperating from a broken leg, according to police.

The incident is just one of several that have occurred in the past year on the busy road which handles high volumes of traffic and pedestrians. The ongoing police investigation will determine who was at fault, although no charges are likely on either side, police say.

Generally, pedestrians have the right of way, particularly if they are in a crosswalk, according to California law.

"But the pedestrian has to be conscious of what they are doing," said personal injury lawyer Howard Kronberg. "According to the law, they shall not relieve themselves of the responsibility to exercise due care ... so they can't just dart out in front of a car or delay traffic."

When the Montana Avenue accident occurred, several area residents said the road is extremely dangerous and exceptionally risky when traveling on foot. While some say the city needs to do more to make it pedestrian friendly, others think the problem is too much traffic and speeding cars. Police officials say the problem is people not paying attention.

"Speed is generally not the primary factor

in pedestrian versus car accidents on Montana Avenue and we have had a number of them," said Santa Monica Police Sgt. Jacqueline Seabrooks. "It's been a combination of autos and pedestrians at fault."

"It's a mutual responsibility."

And while police presence on Montana Avenue has been beefed up, Seabrooks said enforcement of pedestrian laws is just as important. Enforcing those laws supplements

"Speed is generally not the primary factor in pedestrian versus car accidents on Montana Avenue and we have had a number of them."

— JACQUELINE SEABROOKS
Santa Monica Police Sergeant

the traffic safety program that has been used in the city for years.

Along Montana Avenue and other high traffic areas where there is a lot of people on foot, the Santa Monica Police Department combine enforcement efforts with a commercial officer driving a city truck, officers on motorcycle and car cruisers.

One witness to the Nov. 17 accident who walks along Montana Avenue every day with her child wonders why the police department doesn't put a permanent deterrent along the

See PEDESTRIANS, page 3

'Oh deer,' it's an elk!

BY ROGER ALFORD

Associated Press Writer

JACKSON, Ky. — Randolph Scott Stidham was so proud of shooting an enormous deer he drove it around town in the back of his pickup to show it off to friends.

They broke the bad news: He had actually bagged one of 1,300 protected elk that wildlife officials have been trying to restore to the state's Appalachian mountains.

Now Stidham, 38, faces more than \$8,000 in fines and up to a year in jail.

"Anyone who mistakenly shoots an elk is an idiot," said Roy Grimes, deputy state fish and wildlife commissioner. "If a person cannot tell the difference between an elk and a deer, they should get rid of their firearms."

Elk can weigh as much as 800 pounds; the antlers alone can weigh 50 pounds and extend 6 feet. Deer

are about a quarter of the size.

"It's like comparing a tractor-trailer to a pickup truck," said conservation officer Jamon Halvaksz.

Stidham pleaded innocent this week to charges of possessing an elk. He and his attorney had no comment.

"Anyone who mistakenly shoots an elk is an idiot."

— ROY GRIMES
Wildlife commissioner

Prosecutor Hershel Branson said Stidham turned himself in as soon as he realized the error. "Obviously, he's guilty of it, but you have to look at intent," Branson said.

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— Mark Twain

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LOCAL



School board likely to cut students and jobs

SCHOOLS, from page 1

Schools feeling the greatest impact from increased enrollment are Santa Monica High School, John Adams and Lincoln middle schools, and Franklin and Juan Cabrillo elementary schools.

"We just have very high quality schools. We have a great curriculum and a wide breadth of college prep courses. And to top it off we have a great staff of teachers," said Tom Pratt, school board president. "Because the quality of our schools is so superior, parents are taking their kids out of private schools to put them back in public schools."

"That's what caused a lot of these overcrowding problems."

Five years ago the school district was under funded and unable to cope with the financial weight of educating its students. In order to raise

money, the school board allowed many out-of-district students to enroll in Santa Monica. With the increased enrollment came extra money from the state.

Now the school district boasts some of the top test scores in the state and a wide array of classes and extra curricular activities. Lincoln Elementary, for example, was just named one of America's top schools by Disney and will be featured in an upcoming documentary to be aired on the Lifetime Cable Television channel.

School officials said non-resident students currently enrolled in the school district will be allowed to finish out their education in Santa Monica.

"All current students will remain — we just don't want to take on any new students," said Desay. "That's the fair thing to do."

However, Deasy would not comment on specifics of the plan before next Thursday's school board meeting, other than to say with a decreased student body, some budget cuts may be necessary.

"It's a catch 22. The more money you have the more programs you can offer. With less money you have less resources," said Pratt. "And making cuts is the last thing the school wants to do, but it has become absolutely necessary"

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Sidewalk sales offers bargains on Main Street

By Daily Press staff

Celebrate the holidays and shop Santa Monica at the 8th Annual Sidewalk Sale and Open House on Main Street this Saturday. Several boutiques, gift shops, and galleries will have tables with sale items. Salons, home design stores and restaurants are offering discounts, and many businesses will be having parties.

The sidewalk sale starts at noon. Open houses start at dusk and many shops will stay open into the evening. The shuttle will be running free with an expanded route that includes Montana Avenue.

Pacific Park kid sake program deemed successful

By Daily Press Staff

Pacific Park on the Santa Monica Pier launched its Operation Kids' Sake program last month to the delight of 200 kids, their families and various local children's organizations. Some of the participants in Pacific Park's holiday program feature the Boys and Girls Club of Santa Monica, The Salvation Army, Santa Monica College on the Move, Pico Partnership, and Project Echo.

Pacific Park provided each organization with certificates to be distributed during the holiday season by project coordinators. Each certificate entitles one family of four to a day of unlimited rides at the park. The certificates are valid through November 2002.

"As the family amusement park on the Santa Monica Pier, our goal is to celebrate children from the surrounding communities," says Stacy Glazer, director of marketing and sales. "We are pleased to continue our program so all kids have a chance to visit Pacific Park, especially during the holiday season."

Pacific Park, the West Coast's premier family amusement park located on the historic Santa Monica Pier, offers 12 amusement park rides, 19 midway games and attractions and an oceanfront food plaza with seven restaurants. Admission to the park is free and parking is available along the pier.

Winter Faire to be held Saturday

By Daily Press Staff

Westside Waldorf School invites everyone to its Winter Faire to be held Saturday, from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. at 1229 4th St. in Santa Monica. The Faire will feature craft-making for all ages, a marionette puppet show, live music and dance, shopping for holiday gifts, delicious food and a store just for children.

"The Winter Faire is designed to counter the commercialism of the holiday season. It gives us a chance to be part of the creative rather than the buying side of things," said Faire coordinator Gillian Grebler. "It's a celebration of the winter season, when the light from outside is low but the light from inside is full." Westside Waldorf School's Acorn Store, at 1220 Fifth Street, Santa Monica, also will be open, with wooden and handmade toys and dolls, craft supplies, calendars and books for sale.

At 5 p.m., the Faire comes to an end and after a quick communal clean-up, everyone is invited to a multi-cultural Festival of Light, where school parents, students and teachers share some of the winter holiday candle-lighting ceremonies and stories from their own traditions.

Admission to the Faire is free. Tickets will be sold for individual activities. Visitors are invited to bring a can or plastic wrapped package of food to donate to the Westside Food Bank. The Winter Faire is a fundraiser for the school.

Millions worth of improvements coming for pedestrians, city says

PEDESTRIANS, from page 1

roadway like a radar trailer to slow traffic down.

Seabrooks said the police department has tried that — especially at busy intersections like 26th Street and Montana Avenue — but they were shot down by business owners.

"We got complaints for taking up parking spaces," Seabrooks said. "We have heightened the enforcement much to the chagrin of people up there."

City officials are hoping the millions of dollars that they dedicated to pedestrian and safety enhancements will curb the frequency of pedestrian accidents.

Ironically, workers are finishing up hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of improvements to Montana Avenue, as the last part of a city-wide pedestrian improvement project that began in 1998. A second phase of improvements is scheduled to begin next year to make Wilshire and Santa Monica Boulevards more safe, as well as

Broadway and Ocean Park Boulevard. That entire project is expected to cost upwards of \$4 million.

What pedestrians will see are crosswalks that have lights embedded in the road so cars are notified in advance that pedestrians may be there.

"It's really a warning device," said Ellen Gelbard, assistant director of Santa Monica's planning and community development department. "We put them at uncontrolled crosswalks and at night, it really gets the attention of drivers."

Crosswalks that are near schools and "walking districts" also will be painted "zebra" style so they are easier to see. The pattern of the striping is vertical, about two feet alternating with a wide section of unpainted pavement.

People also can expect to see dozens of traffic islands installed on Wilshire and Santa Monica Boulevards so they can negotiate one lane of traffic at a time by stopping in the middle before making it across the entire street.

LA is a city of renters

By the Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — While home ownership rises nationwide fueled by lower interest rates, less than half of the residents who live here own homes, according to census figures.

Only 38.6 percent of residents own their homes, with 61.4 percent renting, census data showed. Only New York City has more renters at 69.8 percent.

In Los Angeles, housing costs consume a larger proportion of income than in New York. More than 90 percent of low-income families spend more than 30 percent of their incomes on rent, according to the analysis.

"People are less secure economically and personally if they are renting," Fernando Guerra, director of the Center for the Study of Los Angeles at Loyola Marymount University. "They have no control over a variety of different aspects of their quality of life."

Los Angeles has bucked the nationwide trend that shows home ownership rose to 66 percent last year.

Yet in some of the nation's largest cities, a large percentage of people still rent. In Chicago, 56.2 percent of the city's units are rentals. In Houston, that number is 54.2 percent, and rentals comprise about 45 percent of housing in Detroit.

Studies have shown that homeowners create a stable community by voting regularly and getting involved in schools and churches.

"When you look at the long-term prospects, people who own homes are more likely to be able to accumulate wealth and pass it on to future generations," added Gary Blasi, a University of California, Los Angeles law professor who has studied housing in Los Angeles.

Of Southern California residents polled in the census, 55 percent said they are pessimistic that the next generation will ever be able to buy a home. About 80 percent said it was difficult for middle-class families to find affordable housing in their areas.

In Los Angeles, experts say, the low rate of home ownership is rooted in a mix of factors including the high cost of land, a huge gap between wages and housing costs, and ineffective housing policies.

In other parts of Southern California, the rates of home ownership more closely parallel the national level. In Orange County, the rate is 62.3 percent and in Ventura County it's 66.2 percent.

According to the report, the percentage of households able to buy a median-priced home last year was 36 percent in Los Angeles County, 28 percent in Orange County, 47 percent in Riverside and San Bernardino counties and 33 percent in Ventura County.

The census report recommends penalizing cities that do not build a specified amount of housing, increasing funding for affordable housing, and supporting developments that mix housing with shops and offices.

Looking for the Daily Press?

The Santa Monica Daily Press is a free newspaper that is circulated throughout all six commercial zones within the Santa Monica city limits.

Hundreds of copies can be found in news racks at these local businesses:

Santa Monica Boulevard Locations:

- Bodies in Motion
- St. John's Hospital
- Sunshines
- Coin Laundry
- IHOP
- Carl's Jr.
- Chevron
- DK's Donuts and Bakery
- Union 76
- King Liquors
- 7-11
- US Bank
- Buon Café
- Quiznos
- St. John's Hospital
- Coogies Café
- Comfort Inn
- Shakey's Liquor
- Stokes Fire
- Convenient Market

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- Main Street Commercial District
- Lincoln Commercial District.

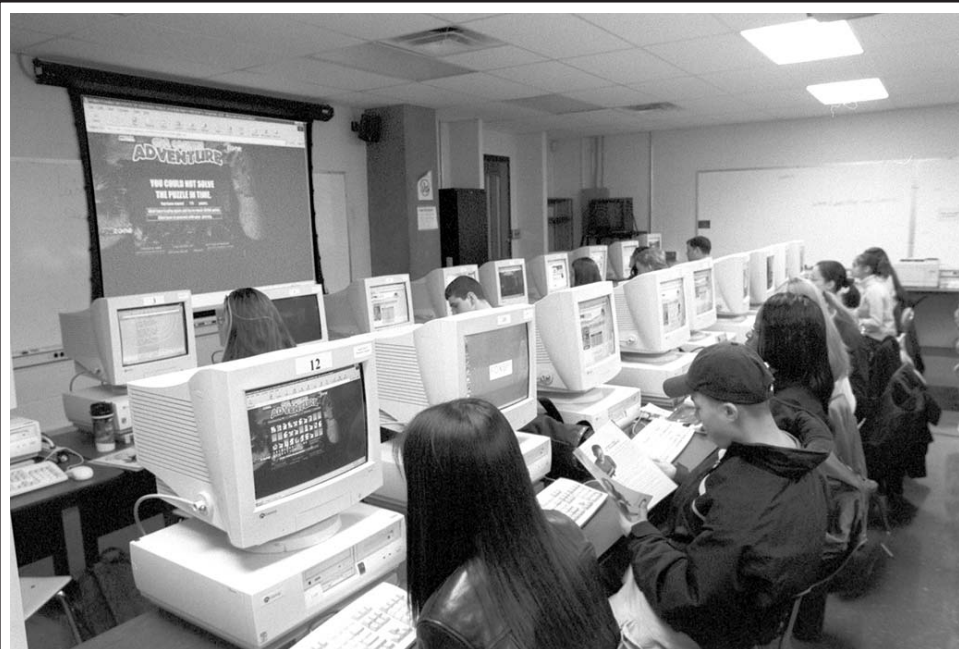
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NATIONAL



Wm. F. Steinmetz/Philadelphia/Inquirer

Students at Temple University try out a "Survivor" like, Web-based game called CPA Career Adventure, in Philadelphia. Accounting degrees awarded nationally fell to 47,895 in the 1998-99 school year, down 20 percent from 1995-96. The number of candidates taking the CPA examination has dropped 10 percent since 1983, according to the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants.

Women more vulnerable to brain damage from Ecstasy

BY EMMA ROSS
AP Medical Writer

LONDON — Ecstasy, the increasingly popular party drug, may cause more brain damage in women than in men, new research suggests.

A study published this week in The Lancet medical journal compared brain scans of people who had taken 50 or more Ecstasy tablets in their lifetimes with those of a group who had never taken the drug. The findings indicated women — but not men — lost a significant number of brain cells, even though the men had taken more Ecstasy over the years.

Fifty tablets is considered the threshold for increased risk of developing psychiatric problems. Experts said the preliminary findings raised an interesting possibility but that larger studies are needed to confirm the results.

Ecstasy, also known as XTC or E, affects serotonin, a brain chemical that regulates mood, emotion, sleep, appetite, memory and sexual behavior. The drug typically induces feelings of euphoria, increased energy and sexual arousal, and makes people feel a need to be touched or hugged.

The illegal drug, known scientifically as methylenedioxymethamphetamine, or MDMA, is also said to suppress the need to eat, drink or sleep, making it possible to endure parties for two or three days.

However, in high doses it can cause a sharp increase in body temperature, leading to muscle breakdown, kidney and heart failure, and death.

Studies have shown it also kills brain cells that release serotonin. Scientists are now trying to find out how long the brain damage lasts and its long-term consequences. So far, studies have found that heavy users have persistent memory problems and preliminary research suggests they also have trouble with verbal reasoning and sustaining attention.

In the latest study, Dutch scientists compared the brain scans of 69 people, who were divided into four groups. One included people who used drugs but not Ecstasy, the second comprised those who

had taken fewer than 50 tablets during their lives. The third, the heavy users, had taken 50 or more Ecstasy pills and the fourth group included people who used to be heavy users but had given up Ecstasy at least a year before the study.

The researchers found that compared to the brains of women who had never taken Ecstasy, the brains of heavy Ecstasy female users had weaker concentrations of serotonin transporters, the sites on brain cell surfaces that mop up serotonin from the space between cells after it has finished acting on other cells.

If the chemical is not mopped up, further brain signals are prevented from getting through.

MDMA gets into the brain cell through the serotonin transporter. A missing transporter means a dead cell, said the study's leader, Dr. Liesbeth Reneman, professor of radiology at the Academic Medical Center at the University of Amsterdam.

The decline in serotonin transporters was not seen in the men's brain scans, she said.

Kathryn Cunningham, professor of pharmacology and toxicology at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, said it makes sense that men and women would respond differently to MDMA.

One reason is that amphetamines are cleared from the body more quickly in the presence of testosterone, she said.

Another fact that supports the findings is that the female hormone estrogen regulates the serotonin transporter, said Cunningham, who was not involved in the study.

"Estrogen-dependent changes in the serotonin transporter might regulate the brain response, and thus toxicity, to MDMA. And it's conceivable that women may be more vulnerable to brain damage at certain times of the month," she said.

MDMA was discovered in Germany in 1913 and patented by a pharmaceutical company in 1914. It was intended as an appetite suppressant, but was never marketed because of its side-effects.

NATIONAL



Bail out bill passes for insurance firms

BY MARCY GORDON
AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON — The House passed legislation Thursday to help the insurance industry cover the cost of claims from any future terrorist attacks. Passage came amid a partisan dispute over restrictions on personal lawsuits seeking damages.

The vote was 227-193, mostly along party lines, as Democrats withdrew their earlier support after restrictions on terrorism-related litigation were added to the bill. The changes clouded prospects for agreement with the Senate on compromise legislation.

The bill would commit the government, for at least a year, to covering 90 percent of losses from another major terror attack; insurance companies would pay the rest. The measure would require insurers to reimburse the government for the aid.

Companies that write policies protecting property were hit hard by the Sept. 11 attacks, with losses estimated at \$30 billion to \$70 billion. The industry remains healthy overall.

Provisions pushed by Republican leaders would restrict the ability of individuals to seek further damages in court. The measure would bar suits against companies, building owners, security firms or other businesses on the grounds that those entities were negligent and failed to protect people against a terror attack.

At the White House's request, provisions barring payment of punitive damages and capping attorneys' fees were inserted Wednesday. Democrats in the House and Senate oppose such limitations and there are no related provisions in a draft version in the Democratic-controlled Senate.

Republicans long have sought to curb trial lawyers, traditionally major donors to the Democratic Party.

Rep. Louise Slaughter, D-N.Y., said the liability provisions were "a heavy-handed attempt to curtail victims' rights."

Lawmakers warned that the dispute could sink the insurance legislation. The changes led the Consumer Federation of America and

Consumers Union to withdraw their support for the bill.

Proponents of the legislation want to send it to President Bush next month. Many insurance contracts expire on Dec. 31, and insurers generally must give policyholders 30 or 45 days' notice before cancellation or major changes in coverage.

Insurance companies have asked state regulators for permission to exclude terrorism coverage from policies next year.

The White House urged prompt House passage of the bill "to ensure the continued availability of insurance for terrorist-related acts."

The Bush administration also said in a statement it is concerned that requiring reimbursement of the government could put a heavy burden on the insurance industry at a time of economic strain.

The legislation is moving more slowly in the Senate. The draft version — endorsed by the administration — would not require reimbursement. It would have the Treasury help cover costs of future attacks for two years, with the industry paying the first \$10 billion each year.

Supporters of the legislation say it is needed to avert major economic disruption. They say it is not an industry bailout and contend it would be difficult to get bank loans for projects such as building construction, pipelines and bridges without terrorism coverage.

"We cannot let the terrorists win by disrupting our economy because we failed to do our job," Rep. Michael Oxley, R-Ohio, chairman of the House Financial Services Committee, said during House debate.

Before the attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, nearly all property insurance policies, both commercial and residential, covered terrorist acts without additional charge. Now, because insurance companies cannot calculate risks associated with potential future terror attacks, they are unable to determine premium levels.

Many insurers are sharply increasing their rates or even withdrawing coverage, lawmakers say.



Associated Press

U.S. Marine Michael Sean Leo, left, from Diamondbar, Calif., and Lance Cpl. Ajmal Achekzai from Salt Lake City, Utah, raise the U.S. flag on the U.S. Marine forward base in southern Afghanistan, early Thursday. The base is within striking distance of the Taliban stronghold of Kandahar. Achekzai was born in Afghanistan and left the country after the Soviet invasion.

Enron employees fearful of future prospects

BY PAM EASTON
Associated Press Writer

HOUSTON — Sitting at his desk at Enron Corp.'s 50-story world headquarters, Nathan Will knows his days are numbered, but he isn't worried about losing his job. He is worried about finding another.

"Am I tainted when I come out of here?" he asked Thursday. "Is an employer going to look at me and say, 'Oh, he worked at Enron?'"

The spectacular meltdown of what was once the world's biggest buyer and seller of energy has left employees bitter and bewildered.

The free-fall continued Thursday, with Enron stock sliding another 25 cents to a humiliating 36 cents a share after reaching more than \$80 earlier this year. Analysts

warned that bankruptcy was the only way out.

Many of Enron's 20,000 employees have already seen their retirement savings devastated because their 401(k) plans were invested heavily in Enron stock.

Enron — an aggressive, even swaggering, player in the deregulated energy market — suffered one of the swiftest, steepest falls ever seen on Wall Street, imploding in just a matter of weeks.

It collapsed after disclosing that executives had engaged in off-the-books business deals and that it had overstated profits by more than a half-billion dollars over the past four years.

Investors lost confidence and dumped their stock, causing Enron to lose tens of billions in value.

Houston-based energy marketer Dynegy had struck a deal to come to

Enron's rescue, but the \$8.4 billion takeover agreement came apart on Wednesday after Wall Street lowered Enron's credit rating to junk status.

The crash has left many investors and employees resentful of Enron's upper management.

"Most people feel as though they know they didn't have anything to do with it, so why are they essentially going to be punished?" said Will, who manages a trading desk for the company's broadband division and up until recently had boasted about working for Enron.

Bob Knudson of Omaha, Neb., a former employee who lost a significant amount of his family's retirement savings, said he wants answers from Enron's top management on why it let it all go down the tubes.

"The swiftness with which all this has

happened, I don't think anybody, whether it is on Wall Street or Omaha, Neb., or Houston could have imagined," he said. "Even the analyst never saw it coming."

Enron has not announced any job cuts, saying in a statement that it would "work to retain the employees necessary to the continuing operations of our trading and other core energy businesses."

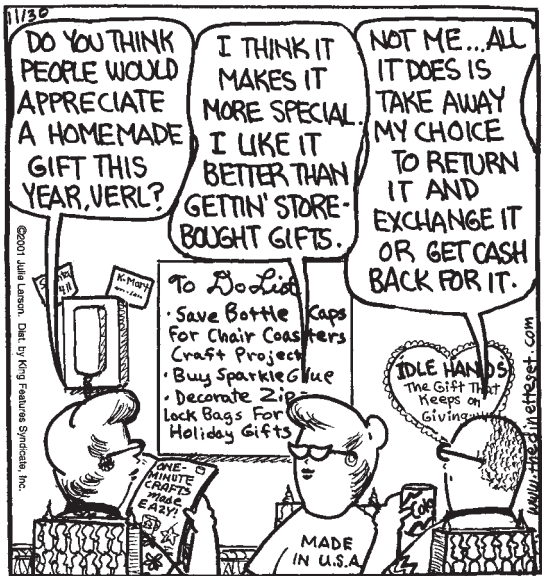
A group of Enron employees sued the company last week, alleging mismanagement by executives running the 401(k) plan resulted in huge losses in their retirement funds. The lawsuit says employees were encouraged to invest more heavily in Enron stock just before it tanked.

"Probably the worst thing is that people who have been with the company the longest amount of time had the most losses," Robin Harrison, an attorney for some of those employees.

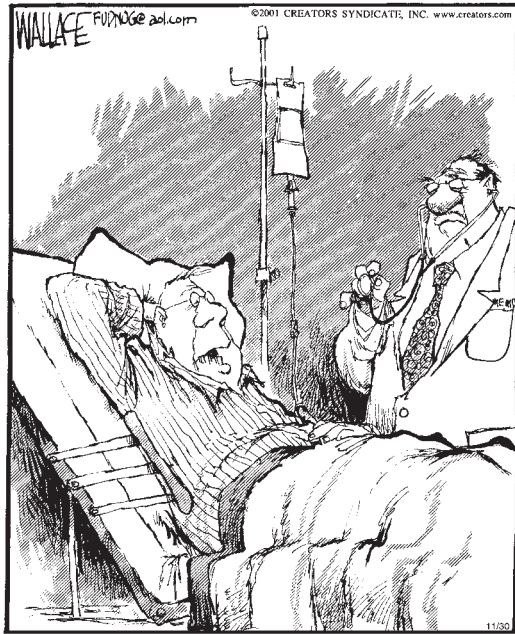


COMICS

The Dinette Set by Julie Larson



Natural Selection® By Russ Wallace



"If laughter is the best medicine, why aren't you tickling me?"

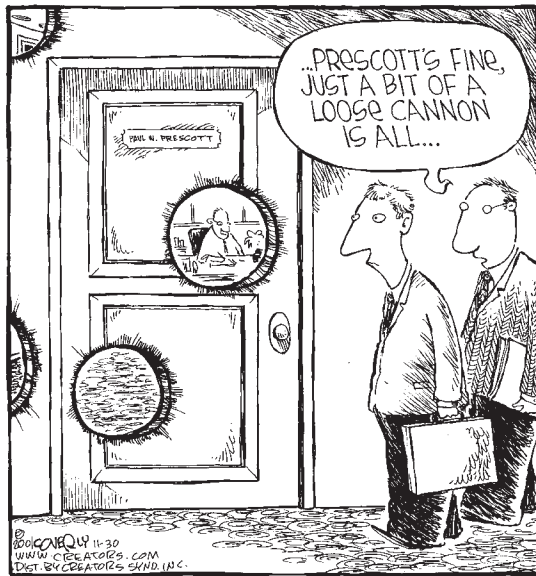
edge city by TERRY & PATTY LABAN



Reality Check® By Dave Whammond



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CROSSWORD By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
1 Do party work
6 Fabric-dyeing technique
11 Earlier, in dialect
12 Without help
13 Arm bones
14 Knight's weapon
15 Sink
16 Common verb
18 Break
19 Cassowary's cousin
20 Went ahead
21 Exploit
22 Fume
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25 Put in
27 Bad reviews
29 Add on
32 Catchall abbr.
33 Gifted
34 Haggard book
35 Utmost
36 Spelling contest
37 Owned
38 Jigsaw unit
40 Police scam
42 Alaska native

43 Bit of color
44 Map sights
45 Wise ones

DOWN

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4 Stretch of years
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6 Made hay, in a way
7 Copying
8 Reprimand
9 If

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Yesterday's answer

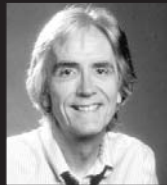
10 Quarter-back play
17 Bureaucratic nuisance
23 ER workers
24 Diner order
26 Swears
27 Foreign correspondent
28 Barbarian leader
30 Modify walls, at times
31 Maze helps out
33 Actor's signal
41 Aunt, to Antonio

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11-30

STUMPED?

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NEWS OF THE WEIRD by Chuck Shepard

Breakthroughs in artificial body parts

• In August, the Food and Drug Administration approved the artificial Neosphincter, a prescription-required, pump-operated device to give relief for otherwise-hopelessly incontinent people; although the device recorded too many "adverse incidents" in trials to be marketed to the general population, it claimed a 90 percent success rate for patients specially trained in its use. And in October, Toronto cosmetic surgeon Robert Stubbs, who has a thriving practice in silicone testicle implants for men missing one or both, told the Edmonton Journal that he can now offer special implants for fully testicled men who merely want bigger ones.

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BACK PAGE

High tech dog doodie detector introduced

BY JENNIFER HAMILTON

Associated Press Writer

BOULDER, Colo. — A Colorado man has found a more down-to-earth use for satellite-tracking devices than stopping drug smugglers or pinpointing military targets: locating dog droppings.

With a global positioning device in hand, botanist Patrick Murphy charts piles of feces along a trail in an attempt to persuade city leaders to ban dogs from the area.

"They, too, will think I'm a nut," said Murphy, 50. "I'm making people aware of the obvious. The dog poop is abundant there. It stinks, it pushes out the deer and the birds."

In this college town where the library recently displayed an exhibit of ceramic penises, some people just

shake their heads.

"I think it's pretty silly," dog owner Jenny Boid said as she walked her golden retriever-chocolate Labrador mix on the trail. "He has a good point, but he could probably put his efforts into organizing a solution, like scheduling community poop pickups."

Three times in the past year, Murphy has walked the Sanitas Valley trail with his GPS device, counting piles of droppings along the gravel footpath. He then plugs the GPS into his computer and generates maps with each pile marked with a green X.

On his last count, he tallied 1,494 mounds in a one-mile stretch, compared with 708 in December 2000.

The former dog owner plans to present his latest chart to the City Council on Tuesday. But council members said they are hard-pressed for a solution.

"Somehow we need to encourage people to be

more responsible," Deputy Mayor Tom Eldridge said. "I wish I had an answer."

Murphy, who holds a master's in plant ecology and is a self-employed environmental consultant to governments and businesses, says dog droppings add nitrogen to the soil, promoting non-native weeds. And roaming canines trample the native sand lilies, prickly poppies and tall grass prairie.

Murphy's goal is to protect the environment and get people to obey the law requiring them to pick up after their animals.

The path has been bumpy. In July, a jury acquitted him of harassment for videotaping three unleashed dogs. Two of the owners were given citations.

"It's kind of like the tyranny of political correctness where nobody wants to say anything bad about dogs," he said.

Lakers center taking law enforcement training classes

By the Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Sheriff Shaq?

The towering center for the Los Angeles Lakers has lofty law enforcement aspirations and has even started taking special classes to be part of a police reserve force that patrols the area's ports.

"I just have a love for policemen because they've always been the real heroes in my life," Shaquille O'Neal told the Los Angeles Daily News in a recent interview. "I would like to have a leadership role."

When he's not throwing down dunks or muscling for position on the court, O'Neal is attending classes offered by the coun-

ty's Sheriff's Department for harbor patrol duty. The classes, taught by volunteer reserves, began in September and ends in February.

O'Neal, 29, even has a custom-fitted uniform and size 22EEE boots. Law enforcement officials know they have a potential recruiting spokesman in the charismatic NBA superstar but say O'Neal has not asked for any special privileges.

"It's great, it's wonderful, it's a boon to law enforcement, to the port police and to the county of Los Angeles," said sheriff's Capt. Garry Leonard, leader of the Reserve Forces Bureau charged with training Shaq.

Law enforcement agencies have been smitten with O'Neal. Oxnard police offered to buy him a custom Lincoln Navigator if he would wear their uniform. And, the Orange County (Fla.) Sheriff's Department in Orlando has made O'Neal an honorary deputy.

Most departments agree they would love to have O'Neal on their force.

"He would definitely make an imposing officer," said Orange County (Fla.) Sheriff's spokesman Jim Solomons. "I'd love to see Shaq be the first through the door on a drug warrant."

O'Neal will have to find time between practices and games to find time for police work. Reserve officers commit

about 20 hours a month.

His ultimate goal is to be a sheriff, possibly in Florida, where he has a home or Louisiana, where he graduated from Louisiana State University. He said he would not run for sheriff in Los Angeles "because you never bite the hand that feeds you. Noel Cunningham and Sheriff Lee Baca gave me this opportunity."

"My goal is to eventually run for sheriff. But in the role of sheriff you really don't need police experience because it's like a political position. However, if I'm going to do it and be with the troops, and get respect from the troops, I want to do what the troops have done."



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