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Airport neighbors fear they'll go down in flames

But 'safety review' effort may crash and burn because of 17-year-old agreement

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON
Daily Press Staff Writer

A recent plane crash at Santa Monica Airport hit too close to home for residents who live nearby.

When a Cessna 340A skidded off the runway and burst into flames Nov. 13, killing both aboard, neighbors — some of whom live only 220 feet away — got a heightened sense of fear when they realized how close they were to having a plane crash in their living room.

That's why they are asking for a safety review of the airport. They want the runways to be shortened at both ends, to create a buffer zone.

The crash that took the lives of Santa Monica resident Richard Runyon and his passenger, Kathleen Vanis of Marina Del Rey, landed just feet away from homes on 23rd Street, west of the airport. The only thing that stopped it from going down an embankment into the neighborhood was a guardrail.

"What would have happened if this was a not a prop plane but a jet?" asked Arthur Kummer, a resident who lives two blocks away. "Would the houses on 23rd Street been hit by the plane and jet fuel?"

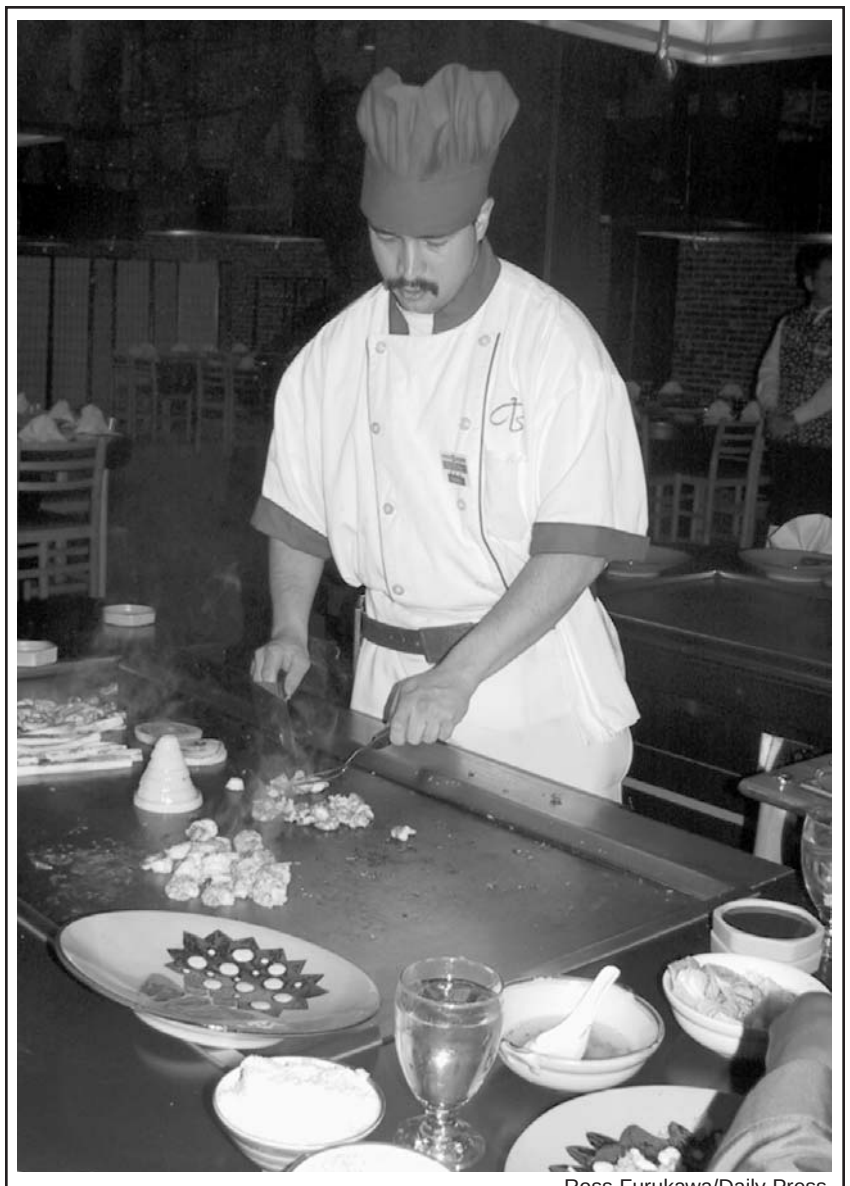
A recent study shows that Santa Monica Airport is unique because it has the closest proximity to neighborhoods than any other airport in the country, said Cathy Larson, a nearby resident and co-chair of Friends of Sunset Park Airport Committee.

She said she has talked to several of her neighbors who have been concerned for years about planes crashing into their homes. The latest crash has brought the fear closer to reality.

"They are really fearful," Larson said. "I certainly don't blame them."

The call for an airport safety review started

See AIRPORT, page 3



Ross Furukawa/Daily Press

Pedro Quinonez stirs up some authentic Japanese cuisine at the newly opened Benihana restaurant on Fourth Street in Santa Monica.

Prospects percolating for Diedrich Coffee house

From staff and wire reports

Diedrich Coffee Inc., the Orange County-based chain once seen as a Starbucks wannabe, appears to be regaining steam after a series of financial missteps.

But the coffee house war will continue in Santa Monica.

Diedrich shares closed at $4 Monday. A year ago, the stock was trading at $1 and was threatened with being delisted from the Nasdaq.

Part of the chain's turnaround strategy has involved trimming debt, reducing expenses and closing underperforming stores.

And apparently, the Santa Monica location is holding its own. Located at the corner of Ninth Street and Montana Avenue, Deidrich Coffee is only two blocks away from Starbucks at Seventh and Montana.

"They have made a lot of progress turning the company around, and the market is just starting to recognize it," said Richard Spencer of Westcliff Capital Management, an investment fund that controls about 21 percent of the company.

Founded in 1972 as a bean importer, Diedrich slowly grew from a family business into a chain of coffee houses, going public in 1996.

In 1999, the company went on a buying spree under former Taco Bell executive John Martin, expanding to its current 382 retail outlets, which include such names as Coffee Plantation, Coffee People and Gloria Jean's Coffees.

But the buying frenzy also put the company on a "death spiral," Spencer said.

"They had trouble integrating the acquisitions, their credit line disappeared and they didn't have the funds to do the franchising campaign," he said.

The road to Diedrich's recovery began in February after Martin was replaced. Under new chairman Paul C. Heeschen and Chief Executive J. Michael Jenkins, the company moved to close unprofitable stores and managed to pay off half its debt in March by raising $6 million dollars.

While the company, which held its annual shareholders meeting Tuesday, is still not profitable, it has managed to cut losses by about half — from $1.1 million last September to $546,000 this year.

Diedrich has also expanded its coffee wholesale business, expanding from less than $3 million, or 11 percent of revenue, two years ago to $18.5 million, or 25 percent this year.

LAX to boost parking rates to $11-a-day

By the Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Parking a car in the central terminal area of Los Angeles International Airport would cost $35 per day, an increase of $11, under a proposal to be considered by airport commissioners Tuesday.

Other outlying parking lots near LAX also would have large increases in parking fees along with Ontario International Airport, owned by the city of Los Angeles, the airport department said Monday.

A sharp decline in parking income since Sept. 11 is behind the proposed boosts. The 24-hour charge for self-parking in the central terminal area was last boosted from $16 to $24 in October 2000.

Hourly parking rates in the terminal area would climb from the current $1 for the first 30 minutes to $3 for the first hour, with $2 for each additional half-hour.

Rates for long-term parking lots B and C near LAX would rise by $3 per day, and range from $8 to $10.

Ontario Airport terminal area parking would go up from $21 to $28 per

See LAX, page 3

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ARIES (March 21-April 19)
★★★★ Finally, your work proceeds as smoothly as you would like. Present facts and let your creativity come out in a discussion. If you have a restriction, your ingenuity will weave right past the problem. Trust your spontaneity. Do needed research. Tonight: A friend jolts you.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
★★★ Family, investments and security always take priority in your life. Today is no exception. A partner or associate donates his time and help as you iron out a recent hassle. A boss notices your distraction. Be careful here, as you could pay the piper. Tonight: Bring extra work home.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20)
★★★★★ Reach out for those around you, especially those whom you regularly brainstorm with. As a member of the team, you're irresistible. Draw a partner or co-worker deeper into the thick of things. Recognize where someone could be causing you a problem. Tonight: Go with the unexpected.

CANCER (June 21-July 22)
★★★★ Think about finances and making decisions independently. At the last minute, what seems workable could bomb out. Think in terms of doing a project or venture on your own. If someone joins in, all the better. Pace yourself, please. Tonight: Treat someone.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)
★★★★ Your creativity draws others toward you, not to mention that big personality. If single or attached, you could be dealing with your social life. Still, it might be appropriate to put some of your endless ingenuity into your work. The unexpected occurs. Tonight: Beam in whatever you want.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)
★★★ You can try to aim for what you want, though you might not exactly get it this very second or moment. Cut your losses with difficult people, making sure not to get in other people's business, if possible. Be wise. Do not choose sides. Tonight: Cut loose as early as possible.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)
★★★★ Make a list of accomplishments you would like to create today. Follow through, making calls and confirming appointments. Your sense of direction invigorates others. What was on the back burner comes forward. Feel good about yourself. Tonight: Hoot and howl away with friends.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)
★★★★ Continue to maintain a high profile. Money matters remain key in your dealings. Your financial discussions draw success and others' admiration, especially if you don't become defensive. Consider someone's wild reaction, and where it stems from. You'll learn a lot about that person. Tonight: Work as late as need be.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)
★★★★ Realize limits within a friendship at a distance. Even though you absolutely enjoy communicating with this person, somehow, unless you see each other more, the energy could fall flat. Read between the lines with a boss's communication. Tonight: Think vacation. Dream vacation.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)
★★★★ Work with others on a one-on-one level. Your instincts guide you in a key partnership. You recognize what others don't, though still letting others know where you are coming from. You could be stunned by financial demands. Tonight: Opt for togetherness.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)
★★★★ You work well with others who are aiming for the same goal. You become a real teammate. As a result, you accomplish much of what you want. Network with others and socialize to your heart's content. Surprise a friend or loved one with a call. Tonight: Do your thing, finally.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)
★★★★ Your ability to manage touchy situations emerges at work or in a day-to-day situation. Someone might be too happy to follow through on your suggestion. You might not be aware of exactly how much others depend on you. Your smile goes a long way. Tonight: Gain insight into someone important to you.

WEATHER

Today ... Sunny with a high of 62°F. Winds from the North Northwest at 6mph.
Tonight ... Clear with a low of 44°F. Winds from the North Northeast at 3mph.
Tomorrow ... Sunny High—66°F Low—46°F

QUOTE of the DAY

"Man cannot discover new oceans until he has the courage to lose sight of the shore."
— Anonymous

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Ross Furukawa/Daily Press

A worker died Monday after building material fell on a power line at a condominium construction site in the 1200 block of 23rd Street. The live wire, located directly next to the work area (as shown in this photo), swung into the worker who fell to the ground, severely burned by electrocution.

Forecast: California economy to rebound in second quarter

BY SIMON AVERY
AP Business Writer

LOS ANGELES — California will climb out of the recession with the rest of the country next spring but the pain caused by the current downturn will linger well into the year, according to a new economic forecast.

Even as the economy begins to grow again and incomes start to rise in the second quarter of 2002, state economists predict the job market will tighten further and there could be some large-scale corporate bankruptcies during the year.

The UCLA Anderson Forecast, a widely watched look-a-head on the economy to be released Wednesday, says the state's 5.7 percent unemployment rate will continue rising gradually and peak at 6.4 percent in early 2003.

"You still have to take care of your money because you don't really know what's going to happen."

— EDWIN GOMES
Los Angeles resident

But the overall impact of this recession will be milder than its predecessor in the early 1990s, when the state unemployment rate hit nearly 10 percent.

For Californians like Edwin Gomes, a 29-year-old resident of South Central Los Angeles looking for an apprentice plumber job, the forecast offers some hope that he'll eventually land a stable job but not enough to spur his spending.

"You still have to take care of your money because you don't really know what's going to happen," he said. "You're not able to spend money on that fancy new coat or other luxury things."

Meanwhile, the forecast calls for personal income in California to increase only slightly this year, by 2.1 percent, dramatically off last year's 9.8 percent growth rate.

Next year that figure could decline even further to 1.1 percent. But by 2003, when economists expect technology, tourism and international trade to be doing well again, personal income should grow by 5.6 percent.

The September terrorist attacks have caused the most direct damage to the state's economy so far, mostly in the hotel industry.

Continuing cancellations and postponements of tourists' visits from affluent countries, especially Japan, threaten further harm in the short-term, said Tom Lieser, senior economist and author of the Anderson Forecast for California.

Long-term, however, the impact of terrorism should ease and tourism — worth $75 billion a year to the California economy — should rebound.

"People get kind of hardened to it after a while," Lieser said.

Regionally, San Francisco and Silicon Valley will continue to bear the lion's share of this recession, which officially began last March. The San Francisco Bay area has been stung by over-inflated real estate prices and the near collapse of spending in the high-tech sector, where orders and shipments remain depressed and jobs are still disappearing.

"It's premature to assume that Silicon Valley has hit bottom, but it might not be too far away," said Lieser.

An improvement in tech prospects is key to any lasting recovery throughout the West, said Rob Valletta, senior economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco.

While the tech sector is showing some signs of stabilizing — including news from the Semiconductor Industry Association Monday that worldwide semiconductor sales rose 2.5 percent in October — strong growth of between 10 and 20 percent will be necessary before the sector becomes the economic driver it once was, Valletta said.

That probably won't occur until at least 2003, he said.

Parts of Southern California, meanwhile, will likely escape the recession altogether due to their economic diversity. But as a whole, Southern California can expect things to get worse before they get better, economists warn.

"It is not immune to the national slowdown anymore," Valletta said.

Although the recession is expected to be mild by previous standards, the return to economic health will be slower and less dramatic than usual.

"There are a lot of things out there that are going to limit the strength of this recovery," said Jack Kyser, chief economist for the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation.

Prominent among them are inflated residential and commercial real estate markets in San Francisco and San Jose, which are only just starting to deflate, and companies' bloated inventories and excess investment in assets such as factories, he said.

Over-investment and supply will likely cause several large-scale bankruptcies across the country in the next year, most likely in the retail and airline sectors, Kyser said.

The state government's worsening financial situation could also slow the rebound, as legislators are forced to make cuts to balance the budget.

LAX seeks to raise daily parking rates

LAX, from page 1

day, with other boosts in outlying lots.

And the Fly-Away parking lot in the San Fernando Valley, where buses carry passengers back and forth from LAX, would double its daily rate to $4.

Airport spokesman Paul Haney did not have an estimate on how much revenue the higher fees would generate. If approved, the increases would take effect at a date to be determined after Jan. 1.

Operating funds at the world's third busiest airport come largely from parking, concessions, airline landing fees and rental car fees.

The airport commission also is scheduled to consider $9.5 million in rent relief for airport concessionaires, due to a steep decline in their passenger business following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Deputy Mayor Matt Middlebrook said there is absolutely no connection between the proposal and contributions from some concessionaires to this year's election campaign of Mayor James K. Hahn. Middlebrook said the rent relief, which the mayor favors, is necessary to keep airport concessions from "going out of business."

Noise the first battle, safety the second at airport

AIRPORT, from page 1

last year, but it was put on the back burner while neighbors took on the long-fought battle over noise. Area residents won that war in October when the Santa Monica City Council took steps to impose hefty fines for pilots, operators and aircraft that violate mandated noise levels. Instead of a $500 fine for violating noise levels, pilots and operators can expect enforcement of fines between $2,000-$5,000 beginning the middle of this month.

"We were working so hard on the noise issue that we were spread too thin but then this accident of course brought it to the forefront," Larson said.

Santa Monica Airport has experienced a 50 percent rise in jet traffic in the last three years, which neighbors say has created an outcry over the escalation of noise violations, pollution and potential safety hazards.

But residents may run into turbulence on their flight to peace of mind. Shortening the runway would not comply with a 1984 agreement between the city of Santa Monica and the Federal Aviation Administration, according to a letter from the FAA to Congressman Henry Waxman, who is helping the Friends of Sunset Park Airport Committee in its effort.

"A reduction of the runway length to 4,000 feet would restrict the ability of certain types of aircraft to operate at the airport and would be contrary to the city's commitment under the agreement," wrote FAA regional administrator Will Withycombe in response to a request by Waxman last year to shorten the runway.

Larson argues Santa Monica Airport's safety regulations are outdated and need to be reviewed.

"When the 1984 agreement was implemented 17 years ago, the parties involved never anticipated this current tremendous growth in jet traffic," she said. "Santa Monica Airport is not compliant with the FAA recommended safety standards as set forth in their advisory circular ... yet their representatives have told us that the Santa Monica Airport is considered 'a safe airport facility.' What are they waiting for, a disaster?"

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NATIONAL

Authorities turn up nothing in O.J. Simpson home raid

BY KEN THOMAS
Associated Press Writer

MIAMI — Federal agents searched O.J. Simpson's home for more than six hours Tuesday as part of an investigation into an Ecstasy drug ring also suspected of laundering money and stealing satellite TV equipment.

Nine people were arrested in Miami and two in Chicago as part of Operation X, FBI spokeswoman Judy Orihuela said. Simpson was not among those arrested, and the FBI refused to discuss why he was involved.

Simpson's attorney, Yale Galanter, said no drugs or large amounts of money were found at the home and that his client had done nothing wrong. He said two boxes removed from the home contained legal satellite television equipment.

"I can assure you Mr. Simpson does not have enough money in his pocket or in his bank account to be involved in a money laundering ring," Galanter told reporters.

He said Simpson's only connection to the case is that his name was mentioned in a phone conversation involving some members of the ring that was taped by federal authorities. He said Simpson has no involvement in the ring, doesn't believe he knows the people involved and doesn't know why his name was mentioned.

Nine other homes in Miami were also searched by authorities.

Simpson was at home when agents arrived about 6 a.m. In video shot by a helicopter, the former football star could be seen in his back yard, wearing a white bathrobe and playing with his dogs during the search.

About two hours later, Simpson left alone in his sports utility vehicle without speaking to reporters. He later declined comment.

Orihuela said the drug ring imported Ecstasy from Holland and stole equipment used to counterfeit cards that activate satellite TV receivers. She said the ring laundered about $800,000 and that a suspected ringleader remains at large, probably in Brazil.

Simpson moved to Florida from California after a civil court jury ordered him to pay $33.5 million for the 1994 slayings of his ex-wife Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend Ronald Goldman in Los Angeles. He had earlier been cleared of criminal charges.

It wasn't Simpson's first brush with the law since he moved to the Kendall neighborhood 15 miles southwest of Miami. He was acquitted in October of grabbing another driver's glasses and scratching the man's face during a road-rage argument.

Galanter said Simpson was not angered by the FBI search.

"He is used to this kind of thing," Galanter said.

Film industry seeks probe of Canadian production subsidies

BY MARK SHERMAN
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — A group of film industry workers asked Tuesday for a federal investigation of Canadian subsidies to the film industry.

Representatives of the Film and Television Action Committee, backed by the Screen Actors Guild and a half-dozen labor unions, filed petitions with the U.S. Commerce Department and the International Trade Commission contending the wage-based tax credits offered to movie and television productions done in Canada are illegal.

"I want my job back," Brent Swift, the committee's chairman and a Los-Angeles-based art director, said outside the Commerce Department. Swift said he has not worked in two years because the subsidies have lured so much movie and television production to Canada.

The Commerce Department has 20 days to decide whether to investigate. An investigation could lead to tariffs on Canadian-made productions. A similar petition also was filed with the United States trade representative calling for negotiations to end the subsidies.

If Canada will not agree, the group wants the U.S. government to impose tariffs on Canadian-made productions when the copies of the film or negatives are shipped to the United States.

The subsidies have cost the United States 25,000 jobs and $10 billion annually for each of the past three years, the petitions contend. The Canadian tax breaks violate U.S. laws and "are contrary to the principles of free trade," according to the petitions.

During a visit last week to Los Angeles to discuss trade, Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien defended his nation's aggressive policies, saying the tactics are similar to those offered by other nations and by individual states in this country.

"We're competitive," Chretien said. "That's what the world is all about. There are no incentives that the Canadian government or provincial governments are giving to the industry at this time that that are not acceptable."

So-called runaway production has been a particular hardship for camera operators, sound technicians and workers in jobs connected to movie and television productions.

Rep. David Dreier, R-San Dimas, and Rep. Howard Berman, D-North Hollywood, say they share the same goal as the group of film industry workers — stopping the loss of movie and television production jobs to Canada.

But Dreier and Berman fear an investigation could lead to a trade war with Canada.

Movie studios would prefer to see Congress pass a bill authored by the two congressmen that would give them the same tax credits in the United States that they now get in Canada. SAG also supports that approach.

Berman said the petitions could hurt U.S. trade with a country to which the United States exports far more than it imports.

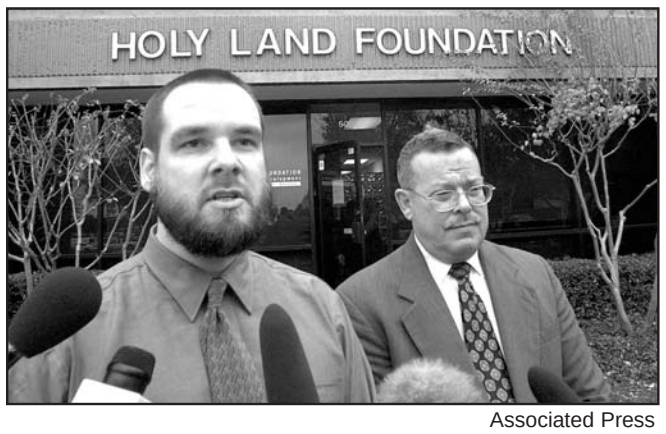
"The last thing we want to do is get into a trade war on film," Berman said. "I much prefer an effort which seeks to take the Canadian approach. ... Let's give them a taste of their own medicine."

NATIONAL ▫ INTERNATIONAL

FBI raids San Diego offices of Islamic charity

BY SETH HETTENA
Associated Press Writer

SAN DIEGO — Federal agents raided the California office of an Islamic charity and carted off all its property and records as part of a nationwide crackdown on organization that the Bush administration called a terrorist front.



Associated Press

John Jenney, left, spokesman for the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development, speaks to the media flanked by the foundation's attorney Tom Hamilton, right. The Bush administration froze the financial assets and closed the offices of the foundation, saying it has links to Hamas, a militant Palestinian organization that claimed responsibility for last weekend's deadly attacks in Israel.

Agents pulled up in a moving van about 6 a.m. and removed everything, from the offices of the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development, including the trash and a water cooler.

The office, which opened earlier this year, is in the corner of a new suite of businesses, next to a pet grooming store.

The only item left behind in Holy Land's office was a small paper American flag in the window and a notice stating that the premises had been sealed by order of the U.S. Treasury Department.

Administration officials said the group, based in Richardson, Texas, raises money for Hamas, a militant Palestinian organization that claimed responsibility for last weekend's deadly attacks in Israel.

The group, registered with the Internal Revenue Service as a tax-exempt charity, raised $13 million last year and calls itself the largest Muslim charity in the United States. It was unclear how much money the group had raised in California.

Bill Gore, the special-agent-in-charge of the San Diego FBI office, stressed that those who contributed to the foundation would not automatically come under scrutiny.

"By no stretch of the imagination does the FBI think because you contributed money to the Holy Land Foundation ... you're involved in supporting terrorism," Gore said.

He said it was too early to tell whether the investigation would result in any charges.

Although the U.S. State Department has investigated the group for years, the Holy Land Foundation cut a high-profile in San Diego.

Last year, then-Mayor Susan Golding dispatched one of her staff to a foundation fund-raiser bearing a proclamation for Holy Land Day, said Elena Cristiano, spokesman for Golding's successor, Mayor Dick Murphy.

The group also helped organize a blood drive following the Sept. 11 attacks, local Muslim leaders said.

Reached by phone, a head of the local office, Mohammed El-Mezain, declined comment. Two Middle Eastern men declined to identify themselves as they left the office following the raid.

"We are innocent and have no relation with any organizations outside," one said from his car.

In Texas, Holy Land President Shukri Abu-Baker attack the seizure as a political move to appease the pro-Israel lobby in Washington.

"If the Holy Land Foundation had violated any U.S. law they would have charged us in a court of law. They wouldn't need to seize our assets." He vowed a court fight.

The foundation was well-respected in San Diego by Muslim and leaders in the greater community at-large.

Mohammed Nasser, who runs the San Diego chapter of the Muslim American Society, said the foundation is a "reputable, trustworthy organization."

"We haven't seen any evidence of the allegations that have been put against it," he said.

Companies make deals around Excite bankruptcy

BY BRIAN BERGSTEIN
AP Business Writer

SAN JOSE, Calif. — AT&T Corp. has dropped its $307 million bid for the assets of bankrupt ExciteAtHome, though the high-speed Internet provider is getting more money from its biggest remaining cable customers in order to keep service for three more months.

The latest developments came after ExciteAtHome cut its cable Internet service to more than 850,000 AT&T Broadband accounts over the weekend because the companies could not agree on new contract terms. A federal bankruptcy judge had authorized the move.

The service remained on, however, for other cable companies that continued to negotiate with ExciteAtHome. ExciteAtHome serves about 3.7 million subscribers in North America

Cox Communications Inc. and Comcast Corp. agreed Monday to each pay Excite $160 million for three months of service, enough time for the cable companies to finish work on their own networks for cable Internet service.

Another large ExciteAtHome cable partner, Toronto-based Rogers Communications, struck a similar deal, though the price was not disclosed.

Insight Communications also said it also had agreed to pay ExciteAtHome to stay on, though it will eventually shift customers to alternate Internet service providers.

Rogers CEO John Tory said all the cable companies' deals require ExciteAtHome to forward e-mails sent to former "AtHome" accounts to addresses at the cable companies' new networks.

The payments, which must be approved by a federal bankruptcy judge, would be in lieu of the monthly subscriber fees that cable companies pay to ExciteAtHome for its service.

Until ExciteAtHome filed for bankruptcy protection, the cable companies had been paying a monthly fee of $12 per subscriber.

AT&T said Tuesday it had withdrawn its bid for ExciteAtHome's assets because the Redwood City-based company violated their agreement.

An ExciteAtHome spokeswoman would not comment.

AT&T owns 23 percent of ExciteAtHome, which uses a fiber-optic network leased from AT&T. AT&T surrendered its majority representation on the company's board in October, hoping to avoid criticism it had engineered the company's bankruptcy so it could buy the cable access network at a steep discount.

AT&T said Tuesday it had moved about 500,000 of its affected subscribers, mainly in Oregon, Washington, Texas and San Francisco, to its own network and restored their Internet access. Next in line were customers in Illinois, Denver, and Salt Lake City.

The process was far from smooth for Brian Smith, 55, of Kent, Wash. His cable modem was restored Sunday on AT&T's new network but conked out Monday. He estimated Tuesday morning that he had spent more than 10 hours on the phone, waiting on hold and talking to several AT&T technicians, but still had no service.



Paul Sakuma/Associated Press

The empty parking lot at ExciteAtHome headquarters in Redwood City, Calif. ExciteAtHome's biggest remaining cable customers have agreed to pay hundreds of millions of dollars to ensure that the bankrupt Internet access provider keeps its service up and running for the next three months.

"I'm not a multimillion-dollar customer and they're just blowing me off one way or another," Smith said.

ExciteAtHome bondholders had hoped to prove the network is worth substantially more than the $307 million in AT&T's offer.

Now the ability of AT&T and the other cable companies to move customers onto their own cable access networks could make ExciteAtHome's remaining life short.

Battle brewing in Jalalabad for bin Laden

BY CHRIS TOMLINSON
Associated Press Writer

JALALABAD, Afghanistan — Anti-Taliban troops hunting Osama bin Laden said they clashed Tuesday with al-Qaida fighters near their hideouts in the towering moutains along the Pakistan border.

Hundreds of fighters piled into trucks and headed to the the White Mountains south of Jalalabad for the battle. Provincial security chief Hazrat Ali said he was assembling a force of about 3,000 more men to join the hunt for bin Laden.

"This fight has just begun," Gen. Richard Myers, chairman of the U.S. joint chiefs of staff, said in Washington.

Ali said a patrol of about a dozen men clashed briefly with a group of al-Qaida fighters, who abandoned a tank and scurried to higher ground. There were no casualties, Ali said.

Mohammed Zaman, defense chief here in Nangarhar province, estimated as many as 1,200 al-Qaida fighters are in the rugged mountains, fleeing to higher altitudes as they abandon the Tora Bora cave complex which has been the target of days of intensive U.S. bombing. Ali said the al-Qaida forces have split into groups as small as 10 men.

A U.S. soldier was wounded Tuesday during the fighting around Kandahar, the Taliban militia's southern stronghold, defense officials in Washington said.

The soldier was shot in the upper chest under the collarbone, but his injuries were not life-threatening, said the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity. The soldier was working with one of the anti-Taliban groups surrounding Kandahar.

In other developments:

— In Koenigswinter, Germany, Afghan factions negotiating a post-Taliban government agreed to form a 29-member council to run the country and begin work on the difficult task of determining who will hold the major posts.

— The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees said some 200,000 people have fled Afghanistan since the airstrikes began on Oct. 7. Ruud Lubbers said he had feared much worse and credited careful targeting of airstrikes by the U.S.-led coalition.

— Zaman, the Nangarhar defense chief, claimed an airstrike late Monday killed bin Laden's finance chief, known variously as Ali Mahmoud or Sheik Saiid, and injured bin Laden's chief lieutenant, Ayman al-Zawahri. U.S. officials were skeptical of the claim.

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said the Americans "have been actively encouraging Afghan elements to seek out" al-Qaida leaders.

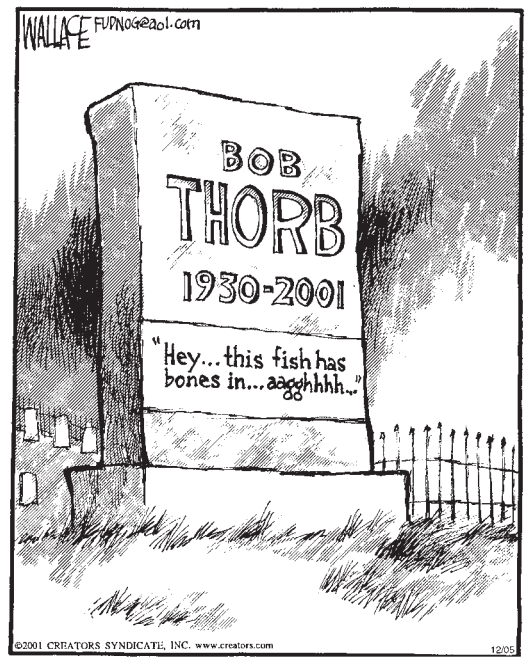
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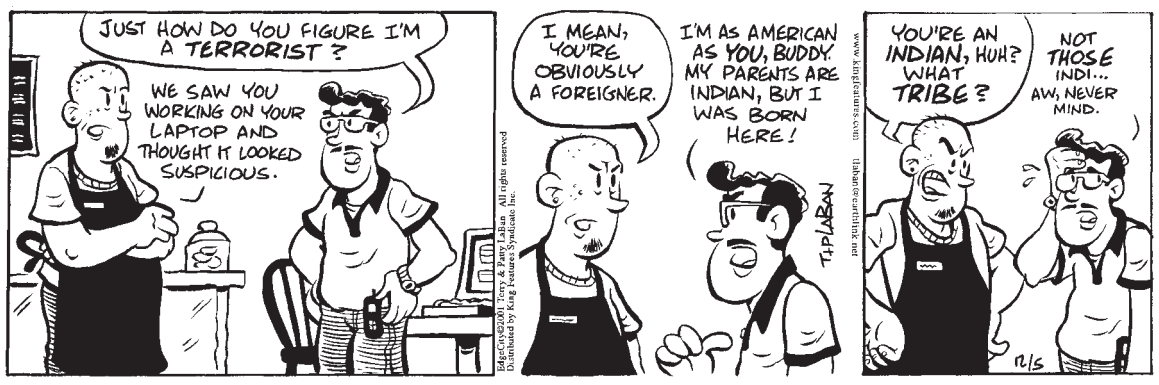
By Russ Wallace



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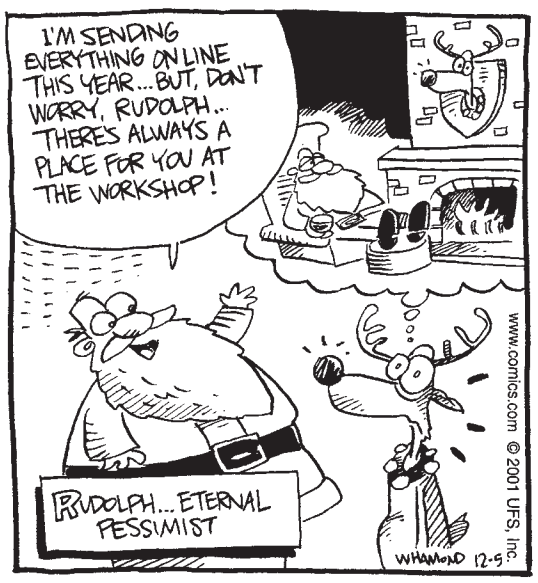
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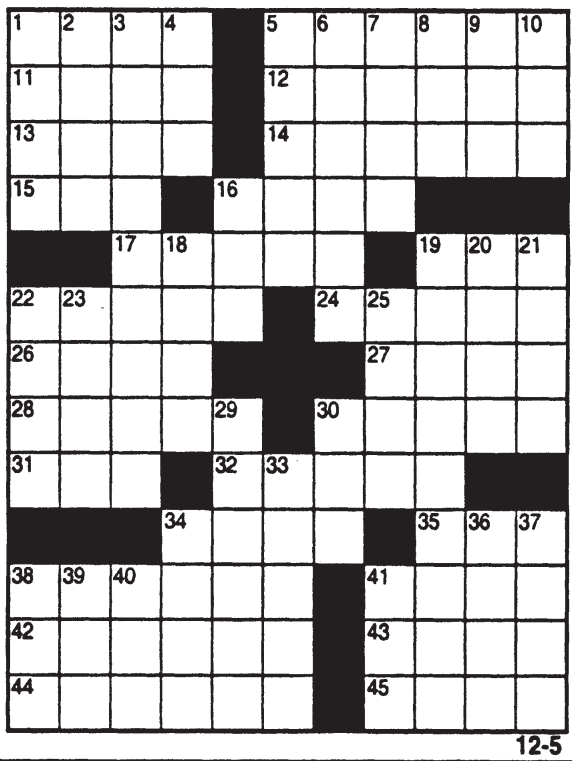
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32 Hollywood type
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DOWN

1 Goldfish, e.g.
2 Lot unit
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6 Dignifies
7 China flaw
8 Great, in surf slang
9 Actor Wallach
10 Perfect score, at times
16 Millinery buy
18 Frank
19 Hired
20 Bullets
21 Bank offering
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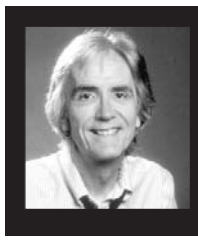
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12-5

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NEWS OF THE WEIRD

by Chuck Shepard

Everybody loves a lawsuit

• Dorothy M. Ellis Williams filed a lawsuit in July against the QuikTrip gas station in Edwardsville, Ill., for injuries to her back and knee when she slipped on a banana peel while walking out the front door.

• Scott Bender filed a lawsuit against U.S. Airways in October, charging that a crew on a February flight from North Carolina had closed up the plane that was parked at a gate in Birmingham, Ala., and left him sleeping in his seat. Bender said he deserves some money from the airline because when he woke up, it was pitch black, and he thought for a few seconds that he was dead.

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BACK PAGE

Stripper-turned-mayor faces recall threat

BY JENNIFER HAMILTON
Associated Press Writer

DENVER — Some residents of a historic mining town want to oust their stripper-turned-mayor, alleging she exposed herself at a local tavern and has tried to abuse her powers.

Koleen Brooks, 37, denied the charges, though the Georgetown mayor said she has flashed her breasts at bars in nearby Evergreen and has vacationed at nude beaches.

"I'm vivacious. I'm a nut. I'm just a social butterfly who wants to bring this town together," said Brooks, a single mother with a 19-year-old son.

Brooks, who worked as a stripper in Denver about 15 years ago, said she is being attacked by political enemies for trying to change the mountain town of 1,100 people about 40 miles west of Denver.

She was elected in April by a vote of 210-179. "No matter what they think of me, at least I'm the voice of the people," said Brooks, a Georgetown native who rides a motorcycle and owns a hair salon in town.

Police investigated allegations that Brooks exposed herself at Dexter's Tavern one night in October but filed no charges.

> **"I want her removed, not for personal reasons but for the sake of the town."**
>
> **— BROOKE BUCKLEY**
> Town board member

"I want her removed, not for personal reasons but for the sake of the town," said Brooke Buckley, a town board member and mayor pro tem.

Board members said the mayor tried to abolish the police department because an officer treated her unfavorably. Brooks said she wants to replace the police department with patrols by the Clear Creek County sheriff's office to save money, not because of any treatment she received.

She also denied claims that she tried to remove several town staffers because they disagreed with her.

She said she's fighting older residents on the board who want taxpayers to bear the expense of maintaining Georgetown's historic Victorian character, which harkens back to the mining boom of the 1860s.

Brooks wants to retain the historic flavor but make Georgetown a better place for teens and low-income workers and lure more travelers driving between Denver and Colorado's ski resorts. She has hopes for a skate park, affordable housing and more attractions.

Local newspaper columnist Gaille Robertson said Brooks faces an uphill battle.

"The old guard wants to control everything about the town, down to the most minute detail," said Robertson, who works for the weekly Clear Creek Courant.

Several people have inquired about the recall process, but no one has filed the paperwork, Town Clerk Phyllis Mehrer said. The board could oust the mayor by a two-thirds vote or a recall election could be held.

Jerry Garcia's guitars headed back to court

By the Associated Press

SAN RAFAEL, Calif. — The legal battle over who will get Jerry Garcia's guitars hit another sour note as settlement talks collapsed between the man who built the instruments and the band members who played alongside them.

Guitarmaker Doug Irwin announced Monday couldn't bring himself to agree to the details of the settlement crafted by his attorneys and those of Grateful Dead Productions, representing several of Garcia's old bandmates.

"I drew the line when their lawyer's fine print said that I had to do a joint press conference with the Grateful Dead where I would have to say that I was fully satisfied with the settlement," Irwin said in a statement.

A tentative agreement was reached early last month that would have given Irwin possession of the two guitars named Wolf and Tiger.

The band was to get the other two guitars Irwin constructed, known as Rosebud and Headless, under the proposed agreement.

But that deal broke down and lawyers for both sides will resume the court battle that is holding up distribution of Garcia's estate.

"I'm afraid the devils in the details have swallowed up the angels in the accord," said William Romaine, Irwin's lawyer.

Irwin built the instruments for Garcia from 1973 to 1990.

A fifth guitar, Wolf Jr., made for the legendary Garcia by Irwin remains missing, according Grateful Dead Productions attorney Eric Doney.

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