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Santa Monica Daily Press

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Survey says: Local businesses hurting

Chamber survey gets real picture of economy from local companies

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON
Daily Press Staff Writer

More than half of the businesses recently surveyed by the Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce have seen their sales drop in the past three months. But the picture is not as bleak as economy experts would have you believe.

"All of the experts were saying the economy was getting better but instead of listening to the economists, I really wanted to get a pulse of business owners here."

— KATHRYN DODSON
Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce, executive director

More than 100 businesses responded to the November survey, which will be used to gauge the business climate in Santa Monica and find ways to combat the problems. Kathryn Dodson, the chamber's executive director who spearheaded the survey, said she wanted an accurate picture of the state of affairs in Santa Monica.

"All of the experts were saying the economy was getting better but instead of listening to the economists, I really wanted to get a pulse of business owners here," she said. "It was important to me to hear what they had to say. It was worse than I thought it would be if you listen to the economists."

And what business owners had to say wasn't as surprising to Dodson as the response was. Within three weeks, 103 businesses responded to the survey — an extraordinarily high percentage, according to Dodson.

Of the businesses that have seen sales go down, 30 percent of them said their business has dropped by 21-30 percent. Another 26 percent say they had business decline between 11-20 percent and 9 percent experienced a drop of more than 50 percent.

As a result, almost one-third of the businesses have laid off employees. Dodson thinks that reflects two things: Many of the companies are small businesses that don't have people to lay off and business owners expect the economy to bounce back quickly so they are hanging onto their employees. When asked if they felt they would have to lay off employees before the economy recovered, 35 percent said they would while 65 percent said their workforce was stable.

And even though it's a challenge to stay in business in Santa Monica, particularly because of Sept. 11 and what some business owners say is overregulation by local government, 90 percent of the companies surveyed said they expect to

See BUSINESS, page 3



Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press

Artist Patrick Harper gives advice to student Cindy Radtke on Sunday afternoon at Will Rogers State Park. Radtke is using Rogers' historic house in the park as her subject.

Watch where you walk

Police on the lookout for jaywalkers

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON
Daily Press Staff Writer

Santa Monica Police are paying special attention to jaywalkers this holiday season.

Citizens are urged to be careful when crossing the street. If they aren't, they could be slapped with a jaywalking ticket.

"We enforce a lot of jaywalking tickets, especially in the downtown area where there are a lot of cars," said Santa Monica Police Lt. Frank Fabrega. "We want people to have a good holiday, not in the hospital."

The Santa Monica Police has beefed up jaywalking enforcement during the holidays as part of the city's "Walkable Westside" pedestrian safety program.

On Saturday, many shoppers on the Third Street Promenade may have noticed larger-than-life signs that give people "tips" on how to get around town whether it's in the car or on foot. The "Moving Violators," wearing the orange signs were on hand Saturday serving as crossing guards at all of the intersections along the Promenade.

If you are stopped for jaywalking, you

See JAYWALKERS, page 3

Coast Guard says 55-year-old kayaker presumed dead

By the Associated Press

MALIBU — An air and sea search ended Saturday night as authorities failed to find a 55-year-old kayaker missing more than 24 hours.

The search for Nicholas Buttle of Malibu ended at 6 p.m., said U.S. Coast Guard Lt. Drew Cromwell. Buttle is presumed to be dead, Cromwell said.

He fell into the ocean Friday afternoon while riding in a two-seat kayak with Eric Alan Hammer, 20, of West Lake Village, authorities said. The two were kayaking off Dan Blocker County Beach in Los Angeles County.

Authorities said Buttle wore no life vest on a day when the National Weather Service issued advisories and warnings for strong offshore winds.

"The chances of anyone surviving more than seven hours in water that's 48 degrees just wearing a T-shirt and shorts is nil," Cromwell said.

An Air Force helicopter, along with vessels manned by the U.S Coast Guard and county lifeguards searched a 50-square-mile area.

The Coast Guard received reports of the accident shortly before 6 p.m. Friday after a California Highway Patrol officer answered an emergency call stating, "Sea kayak off Malibu. Help."

Hammer told authorities he threw Buttle a paddle to help him stay afloat.

Hammer was rescued 3 miles off the coast about 9:30 p.m. Friday. He was treated for hypothermia at UCLA Medical Center. Authorities also recovered two paddles and the men's kayak.

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HOROSCOPE

Leo, make it an early night

JACQUELINE BIGAR'S STARS

The stars show the kind of day you'll have:
★★★★★-Dynamic ★★★★-Positive ★★★-Average ★★-So-so ★-Difficult

ARIES (March 21-April 19)
★★★★ Others carry the ball today, and you cheer them on to the finish line. Unexpected news flows from an associate or a meeting. Your high energy might be raring to go. Wait until later. Call a loved one and ask them to join you. Tonight: Don't worry about differences. Look at similarities.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
★★★★ Use your strong intentions to clear out your work. You could have a surprise message or a request from an associate or friend. Your high energy cheers up a friend or loved one suffering from the Christmas blues. You don't need to talk about his or her mood. Tonight: be careful when spending.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20)
★★★★ Your strength and creativity peak during the daytime hours. Use your time wisely, especially as your ingenuity hits a high point. During a coffee break, brainstorm with buddies about holiday presents and ideas. Opt for an unusual gift rather than a traditional one. Tonight: Head home. Soak in a hot tub.

CANCER (June 21-July 22)
★★★★ Dealing with associates could take talent, especially those tied up with your finances. Logic works well, especially when another could be rigid. This person often comes from an emotional stance, whether or not he or she realizes it. You could succumb to fatigue. Tonight: Nap and then decide.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)
★★★★ Listen to a partner, even if sometimes you think this person is a little over the top. Good ideas breed in a tolerant environment. Others will stomp and carry on until you hear them loud and clear. Enjoy their enthusiasm. Tonight: Make it an early night.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)
★★★ Finances and work go hand in hand. Walk through an especially exciting offer. Don't worry about your energy level; you have what it takes! A boss could be negative; trust your present judgment. Check in with a roommate. Tonight: Meet a friend.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)
★★★★ You're all smiles during the day as you start things off with a happy conversation. A child or new friend needs your attention. Do something important or special for a loved one. News from a distance could be a bit of a downer. Tonight: Work on your Santa chores.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)
★★★ Step away from work. Call out, if you can, and enjoy family and close associates. Make it OK to take a snooze or do nothing. Worry less about what others think and more about what you need. Decide to do something just for you. Tonight: Enjoy the moment.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)
★★★★ Groups prove unusually fortunate. Gather with co-workers over lunch. Don't miss a meeting. Others help you onto the path you seek. Speak your mind. Clear out errands. Your smile makes a difference to others. A loved one could be jealous about all the attention you're getting. Tonight: Address cards or read a book.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)
★★★★ Others dump responsibilities and errands on you. You might wonder: Why me? Well, it's because you're so effective and dynamic that everyone trusts you. To earn your pay, you might have to run around more than you want. Remain good-natured. Tonight: Order out.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)
★★★★★ You're unusually assertive and direct right now. Those at a distance reach out for you, or vice versa. Refuse to stand on ceremony, and stay clued in to possibilities. Realize your limits right now when dealing with someone who might be stuck. Tonight: Stay out late.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)
★★★★ Success stems from dealing with others on a one-on-one level. Willingly reveal more of your thoughts and concerns. Don't worry so much right now about telling this person about your frustration. A partner will understand. Check out a boss's idea. Tonight: Rent a movie on the way home.

WEATHER

Today ... Sunny with a high of 61°F. Winds from the Northwest at 11mph.

Tonight ... Clear with a low of 43°F. Winds from the North at 8mph.

Tomorrow ... Sunny High—61°F Low—42°F

QUOTE of the DAY

"You can't soar like an eagle ... when you work with a bunch of turkeys."
— Anonymous

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LOCAL

Some westside communities bounce back in business

BUSINESS, from page 1

remain in Santa Monica five or more years. Those who are considering leaving said it was because of taxes, real estate rates or overregulation.

"The positive response to that really surprised me," Dodson said. "When times are bad people usually close up shop. Obviously in Santa Monica, as hard as it may be to do business here from a regulation standpoint, is important to them (to stay)."

Those hit hardest since Sept. 11 have been hotels, retail shops and restaurants. Of the 11 hotels that responded, all of them had a drop in business and 82 percent have laid off employees. Of those surveyed, 67 percent of the retailers and 75 percent of the restaurants had a decline in business. Half of the restaurants laid off employees and said they might have to lay off more people. About 20 percent of them said they might not be in Santa Monica in five years.

"It was pretty clear that everyone affected by tourism were the hit the hardest," she said. "The shocks continue down through the economy."

Some businesses have actually done better since the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11. According to the survey, 18 percent of the businesses surveyed said they have seen an increase — insurance companies, mortgage companies, auto dealerships and the healthcare industry.

Dodson hopes the $100,000 marketing campaign "Shop Santa Monica" helps end-of-the-year sales numbers for local merchants. The campaign is pushing residents to spend their hard-earned dollars within the city by inundating them with advertisements and messages through television, print, radio and direct marketing.

"It's not going to cure it but it will help," she said, adding the survey gives the chamber a basis on what direction to go from here. "We do need to determine what besides the Shop Santa Monica campaign we can do."

Nearby communities like Beverly Hills have started to see their residents and guests get a bit looser with their money.

"By talking to some of the retailers they have said business and sales was better than expected (this holiday season)," said Todd Steadman, director of economic development and government affairs for the Beverly Hills Chamber of Commerce. "There is a lot of pent up spending and people do feel obligated to spend more this year."

And according to Jack Kyser, chief economist of the Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation, an expected interest rate cut of a quarter percentage point on Tuesday may boost consumer confidence through the end of the year, but it won't solve the worries of the westside.

"I have talked to the westside communities and they are suffering," he said. "It's going to be a tough couple months because a lot of people are waiting and waiting to see what will happen."



Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press

Children from the Santa Monica Second Ward Primary Chorus of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Church warm up the crowd on a windy and cold Sunday afternoon during the opening ceremony of Ocean Avenue's annual nativity scene. The scene has 14 life-size exhibits that illustrate the story of Jesus' birth and early childhood.

Signing a jaywalking ticket doesn't mean guilt

JAYWALKERS, from page 1

had better sign the citation or you'll end up in jail. That's what happened to Doris Johnson last week when she refused to sign the ticket for illegally crossing Santa Monica Boulevard along the Promenade. If a person refuses to give information about themselves to officers, they have no choice but to place them into custody for a vehicle code violation, Fabrega said. He added that often times people who are hauled off to jail eventually sign the ticket when faced with incarceration, which is what Johnson did last week.

"A citation is only a notice to appear, it's not an admission of guilt," he said. "By signing the ticket, it does not mean you are guilty."

Terror attacks send pump prices to two-year low

BY CHRISTINA ALMEIDA
Associated Press Writer

LOS ANGELES — Gasoline prices have plunged more than 40 cents per gallon in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks to a two-year low, an analyst said Sunday.

The average retail price of a gallon of gasoline, including all grades and taxes, was about $1.15 on Friday, down more than 8 cents per gallon in the past three weeks alone, according to the Lundberg Survey of about 8,000 stations nationwide.

It's the lowest price since March 1999, when the national average was about $1.08.

In some cities the average gas price dipped below a dollar per gallon, to the joy and amazement of drivers.

"It was $2 a gallon less than six months ago," said Jeffrey Spring, a spokesman for the Automobile Club of Southern California.

"Those good ol' days are back," said Cyndi Burrough, 49, as she filled her car for 99 cents per gallon at an Arco station in the San Fernando Valley. "Everybody, get your gas cans out."

Honolulu had the most expensive gas surveyed at $1.70 per gallon on average. In Atlanta, the average was just 90 cents.

In Yardville, N.J., drivers found unleaded gas for as low as 89 cents a gallon.

"Anything below a dollar is marvelous," said Leon Falardeau, who was filling up at a Gulf station off Route 130.

Wagih Kamar, owner of an Arco gas station in Los Angeles, said he hopes his 99-cent regular gas will make the holiday season better for his customers.

"We're not trying to beat our competitors," he said. "We need to help the economy. The more people coming in, it's better for everyone. They can use the money to go to the mall and buy their kids some gifts for Christmas."

The roller coaster ride for gas prices began in May, when the national average peaked at $1.76 per gallon.

"There had been pressure to prepare for summer driving. Demand was strong. An oversupply developed," Lundberg said.

Prices bottomed out in August and began slowly rising — until Sept. 11.

Crude prices crashed amid the shakier world economy and uncertainty about U.S. retaliation. Americans did some panic buying but then became afraid to travel, aggravating the usual seasonal drop in gas demand because of cold weather.

Crude oil prices have only recently begun rising again. The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries wants to reduce production, but "weak economic conditions and swollen gasoline supplies are likely to keep pump prices low through New Year's and beyond," Lundberg said.

"All bets are off, however, if military action in the Middle East should spread to any oil-producing nations," she added.

Fear of flying and the low gas prices may yet raise winter demand.

A record 87 percent of Americans traveled by car this past Thanksgiving, and the Auto Club expects that will continue into the holiday season, Spring said.

"The lower gas prices might push them over the fence and help them decide to go somewhere," he said.

At an Exxon station in North Dallas, Texas, Robert Corsey filled up for $1.04 per gallon. Corsey said he'll make more trips to East Texas to visit his parents over the holidays.

"It's very convenient to travel now," he said.

Spy book author to speak Tuesday

By Daily Press staff

A book examining the case of controversial spy Jonathan Pollard will be the focus of a talk Tuesday by its author Mark Shaw.

Joining Shaw, a former criminal defense lawyer who has appeared as a commentator on the O.J. Simpson case, will be Dr. Morris Pollard, father of the convicted spy. Shaw's latest book is "Miscarriage of Justice: the Jonathan Pollard Story."

Pollard admitted he spied for Israel in 1985 by passing U.S. documents he said contained warnings of impending terrorist attacks. His sentence to life imprisonment has made his the most controversial recent spy case in U.S. history.

Shaw will speak Tuesday Dec. 11 at 7 p.m. at the Wiesenthal Center in Beverly Hills. For more information, call 310-247-9613.

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LOCAL

NEWS BRIEFS

Second round of review for library set

By Daily Press staff

Santa Monica City Council will review design concepts prepared by architectural firm Moore Ruble Yudell for the new main library at its meeting on Dec. 18.

At a meeting between the city council and the library board on Nov. 13, the firm presented initial conceptual plans for the library and invited public comment. Based upon input from the community, council and the board, library staff has prepared a report that describes key features of the revised conceptual design.

Moore Ruble Yudell was selected to design the new library in 1999 following passage of Proposition L by Santa Monica voters in 1998. The Santa Monica-based firm has built, expanded, and renovated libraries on the UCLA campus, Caltech, and the Humboldt Library in Berlin, Germany.

For information call (310) 458-8608.

SMC wormin' it up

By Daily Press staff

In an effort to reduce waste, generate a source of organic fertilizer and launch an unusual community education project, Santa Monica College is turning to worms.

SMC will officially launch today its vermicomposting project, a process that uses worms to eat up as much as 150 pounds of food waste each day that yields a clean and odorless organic fertilizer. The college already has installed a Vermitech machine, the second of its kind in California and one of just a handful in the entire country. Three hundred pounds of worms are eating the food waste.

The project is being closely watched by city officials of Santa Monica, a municipality known for its commitment to recycling. The city provided $25,000 — half of the cost — of the machine, with a matching $25,000 coming from Ann Petersen, representing the Esper A. Petersen Foundation. The donation was made through the SMC Foundation.

SMC is investing about $10,000 for an awning and electrical connection system, and college employees and student workers will operate the composting project, said Tom Corpus, grounds and landscape supervisor.

Fully automated and temperature-controlled, the Vermitech machine shreds food waste (and discarded paper towels) and dumps it into the mass of worms, which eat it. The worms' droppings fall underneath the machine and are collected for use as an organic fertilizer and even as a pest control substance.

Currently, the college recycles about 37 percent of its waste, primarily paper and cardboard, beverage containers, green waste, and construction and demolition material. This will be its first venture to recycle food waste, which accounts for about 7 percent of the campus' overall waste.

The first Vermitech machine, developed by Canadian entrepreneur Al Eggen, was installed in Toronto Metropolitan City Hall in 1994. Since then, 10 machines have been installed at schools, universities, military bases and hospitals in the United States, Canada and Europe.

Santa Monica city officials say they might seek to duplicate the college's efforts at such places as the Third Street Promenade, the site of many restaurants that generate food waste.

New faces on SMC board

By Daily Press staff

Patrick Nichelson has been elected chair and Herb Roney vice chair of the Santa Monica Community College District Board of Trustees for 2002. Their one-year terms began Dec. 3.

Nichelson succeeds Annette Shamey and Roney fills the spot previously held by Nichelson.

This is the third time Nichelson, who has been on the board since 1987, is serving as chair.

A professor and chair of the religious studies department at California State University at Northridge, he teaches courses in world religions, religion and literature, and ethics. He is currently the director of the University Honors Program at CSUN and recently served on the faculty council for CSU Channel Islands (in Camarillo) that helped design the master plan and selected the first permanent faculty for the newest campus of the Cal State system.

Nichelson is the former president of the California Faculty Association, the union that represents approximately 20,000 professors at all 23 campuses of the CSU system.

He is a member of several organizations, including the American Association of University Professors and Santa Monicans for Renters Rights. Nichelson received his bachelor's degree in philosophy and Spanish from St. John's College, a master's in religion at Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles and a Ph.D. in social ethics from the University of Southern California.

Roney was elected to the board of trustees in November 1994 after a long career as an SMC administrator and teacher. Re-elected to the board in 1998, he is serving his second time as vice chair and has served once as chair.

A longtime Santa Monica resident and decorated Marine Corps veteran, he has been active in many organizations, including Santa Monica Rotary Club, KCRW Foundation, Santa Monica Airport Commission, and Santa Monica High School Alumni Association Board.

A graduate of Santa Monica High School and SMC, Roney received his bachelor's degree in education and master's in administration from California State University, Los Angeles.

INTERNATIONAL ▫ NATIONAL

Room by room; cave assault is deadly business

BY JOHN J. LUMPKIN
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — The rules for a cave assault: Strike fast and hard, keep the enemy off balance, use four-man teams and advance quickly from room to room.

A U.S. military expert said those are the type of tactics likely to be used by American commandos and anti-Taliban Afghan rebels advancing on the Tora Bora and other cave and tunnel complexes where Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaida leaders are suspected of hiding.

"We try to rely on speed," says Army 1st Sgt. Alexander Somoda, a Ranger and combat veteran from Panama and Iraq who now trains infantry troops in urban combat at Fort Lewis, Wash. "You want to hit them hard. You knock him back on his heels."

Laying out the tactics for an assault, he says to watch for traps once inside a cave and prepare for casualties — it's hard to miss when armed men are shooting at point-blank range.

"If the enemy is very clever, there's a certain point you're going to lose a few people," says Somoda.

An estimated 1,500 Afghan tribal fighters, aided by U.S. commandos, are advancing down a valley near the Tora Bora complex in the White Mountains south of Jalalabad.

It's unclear how much close-quarters instruction that U.S. forces may have provided, but it's among the things Green Berets are trained to give, said Army Special Forces spokesman Maj. Gary Kolb.

Much of America's high-tech superiority would be lost in a direct cave assault. No air support, no computers, no satellite aid. Caves are too dark for night-vision goggles to be effective. The troops must rely on gun-mounted flashlights to see.

To some, waiting out members of the al-Qaida network is a safer course of action.

"They should lay siege, rather than go in and fight for every inch — it's not worth it," said Ali Jalali, a former Afghan colonel who fought with the mujahedeen against the Soviet Union.

An Army company — about 150 soldiers — would be assigned to a cave complex. After confronting guards outside the cave, the unit would then move to isolate the entrances, preventing escape and reinforcement.

Stationed outside, soldiers with mortars, heavy machine guns and sniper rifles would fight off any approaching enemy forces. Then, squad by squad, the rest of the team would go in.

A nine-man squad would advance toward a particular section of the cave. Most would have a smaller version of the M16 assault rifle. Two troopers would have heavy-duty automatic rifles with magazines holding 200 rounds. Two more would have rifle-mounted grenade launchers. Special operations commandos also would have shotguns.

Somoda says the goal is to move swiftly and prevent the enemy from organizing. But as the soldiers advance, they risk triggering a trap — probably a tripwire that springs a grenade.

He advises his troopers to stay alert, watch for anything that catches their eye: "If there's something that makes you look up, you better look down."

Tossing stun or explosive grenades is extremely dangerous. The concussion from the blast could hurt U.S. and allied troops, and cause an avalanche of stone. The Soviets used chemical warfare extensively to roust mujahedeen from caves during the 1980s, but many U.S. infantry units are not equipped with such weapons for high-speed assaults.

Instead, Somoda says a four-man team would assault a room — rushing in one at a time, assigned to different parts of the room.

Once the shooting stops, the team checks to make sure no member is hurt and moves on to the next room.

Soldiers would guard intersections and passageways and leave lighted markers to alert new squads which areas have been cleared.

U.S. intelligence believes al-Qaida has between five and 10 mountain hide-outs in the area like the Tora Bora complex, but has little information on the layout within. In addition, hundreds of natural caves dot ridgelines and mountainsides.



Associated Press

Marine LCPL Carlos Romero, right, of Long Beach, Calif., uses binoculars to check the horizon from his fighting hole near Camp Rhino in Southern Afghanistan on Sunday. At left is LCPL Bryce Collins of Juneau, Alaska. At center is Cpl. David Lacerte of Montegut, La.. The Marines are with the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit from Camp Pendleton, Calif.

Outbreak in Gabon confirmed as deadly Ebola

BY ALEXANDER G. HIGGINS
Associated Press Writer

GENEVA — An outbreak of fever in the west African nation of Gabon has been confirmed as the deadly disease Ebola, the World Health Organization said Sunday.

It is the world's first documented outbreak of Ebola since last year in Uganda, where 224 people — including health workers — died from the virus. Ebola is one of the most virulent viral diseases known to humankind, causing death in 50 to 90 percent of all clinically ill cases.

"It's been confirmed by a laboratory in Gabon," WHO spokesman Gregory Hartl told The Associated Press. "We've had reports that seven people have died."

Hartl said WHO has already sent a team to help the coastal nation and that a second team of four specialists would leave Geneva for Gabon on Monday.

The outbreak is in remote Ogooue Ivindo province in northeastern Gabon, he said. Gabon was last afflicted in an outbreak in 1996-97 that killed 45 of the 60 people infected.

"We've had very little information," Hartl said. The confirmation came from a laboratory in Franceville, also in eastern Gabon.

A team from the Gabon Ministry of Health and the International Center of Medical Research in Franceville went to the province last week when they first received reports of that the outbreak might be Ebola, Hartl added.

On Friday, Hartl said there were unconfirmed reports of a possible outbreak in nearby Congo.

Ebola is passed through contact with bodily fluids, such as mucus, saliva and blood, but is not airborne. The virus incubates for four to 10 days before flu-like symptoms set in. Eventually, the virus causes severe internal bleeding, vomiting and diarrhea.

There is no cure, but patients treated early for dehydration have a good chance of survival.

WHO says more than 800 people have died of the disease since the virus was first identified in 1976 in western Sudan and in a nearby region of Zaire, now Congo.

The first case in Gabon was documented in 1994, the agency says. After the 1996-7 outbreak in Gabon it wasn't documented again until it appeared in Uganda last year.

WHO recommends that suspected cases be isolated from other patients and that strict barrier nursing techniques be used to shield health workers from exposure.

Gloves and masks must be worn and disinfected before reuse, the agency says. Patients who die from the disease should be promptly buried or cremated.

Customers come for linguine and a look at new cars

BY JEFF WILSON
Associated Press Writer

FILLMORE, Calif. — An Italian dinner house is doing brisk business on the showroom floor at William L. Morris Chevrolet, where car shoppers are tempted with chicken parmigiana as they kick the tires of new cars.

Squinting in candlelight to examine window sticker prices, guests find gleaming chrome is a dazzling appetizer.

"What a great idea! This is so cute," Judy Watkins, 53, an Italian chef who lives in Cathedral City and recently visited Chef Franco's.

The idea of a showroom/Italian restaurant combination was hatched by 71-year-old dealership owner Chappy Morris Sr., who now regrets naming it Chef Franco's.

"I should have called it The Dealership," Morris said.

The chicken parmigiana is $7.95 and nothing on the menu costs more than $15.95 — that's the fully loaded veal parmigiana. And, of course, there's bow-tie pasta.

It's the ultimate Italo-automotive dining experience. Prospective buyers can open the door of a $25,000 Monte Carlo and be treated to the comingled fragrance of leather and garlic.

At 5 p.m. daily, the showroom lights are dimmed and piano music kicks through speakers as guests are ushered to tables covered with red-checkered cloths and flickering candles. Diners can sip on Chianti while examining a new Silverado pickup truck or Camaro.

Chef Franco Onorato also does his thing, chatting up the chardonnay and marinara.

"In Southern California, it's a natural. People here love their cars," Onorato said of the food-and-auto marriage.

Morris and Onorato believe the showroom/restaurant combo is unique.

"I don't know of any other, do you?" Morris said. "People are buying cars while they're eating."

When the downtown dealership was wrecked in the 1994 Northridge earthquake, Morris drew up plans for a grand new facility a block away on Highway 126 and included a full professional kitchen.

The idea was to serve breakfast and lunch while customers waited for car servicing — Mr. Goodlunch was the working name.

Enter Onorato. He was left jobless with the closing of Santa Paula's Glen Tavern Inn and showed up at Morris' doorstep proposing a nighttime Italian bistro.

"This guy shows up," Morris recalled. "He was from Italy and he bought his first car in America from us. He wanted to open a restaurant here and I said I'd hire him. I thought I could turn him into a car salesman."

"I said, 'Now Franco, I don't have a dining room,"' Morris said. "We put some tables on the showroom floor. I apologized to people and they said, 'What for? We like looking at the cars."'

The result was unexpected. People come from as far away as Huntington Beach.

"The thing that is funny about it is the food is very good," Morris said.

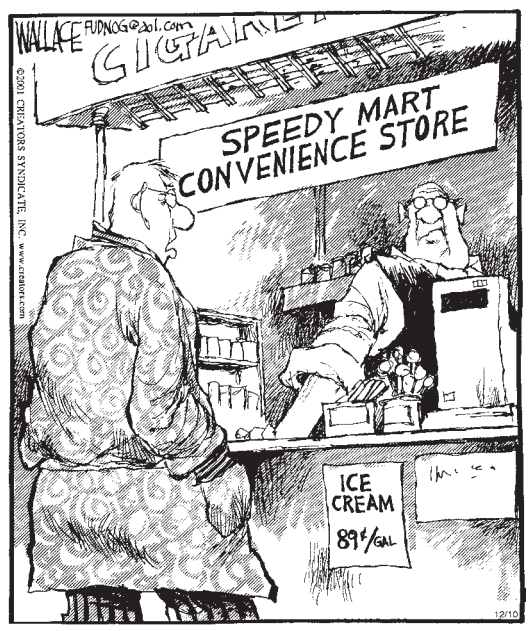
COMICS

The Dinette Set by Julie Larson



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By Russ Wallace



"It's not really convenient for me to come down here. Could you just bring stuff to my house?"

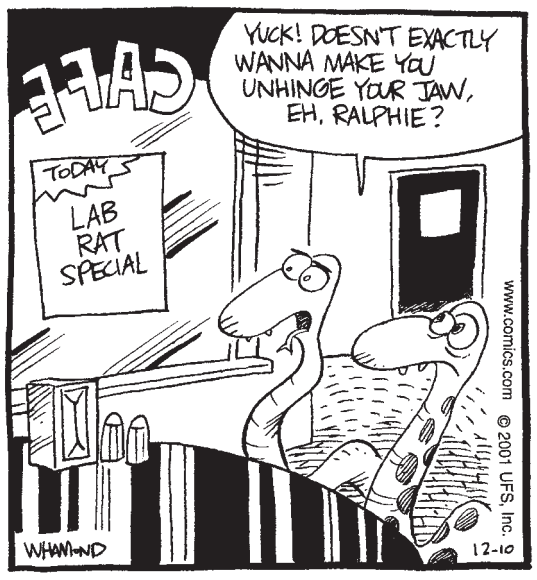
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ACROSS

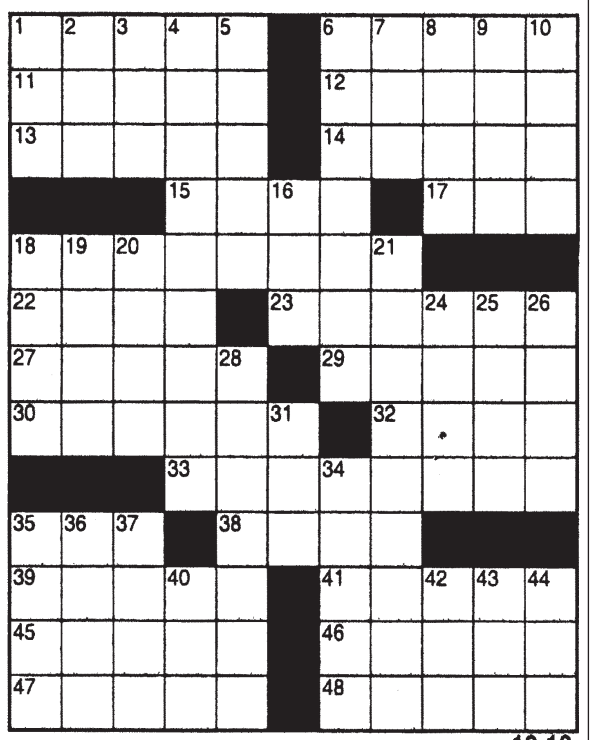
1 Between-meals nosh
6 Cancel the mission
11 Climber's spike
12 Kind act
13 San Antonio landmark
14 Gallery item
15 Singer James
17 Confederate general
18 Period of the dinosaurs
22 On the roof of
23 Right away
27 Hackneyed
29 Blur
30 Actress Stone
32 Noble rank
33 Like the American political system
35 Saloon bill
38 Sine study, for short
39 Suspect's story
41 Identifies
45 Doled (out)
46 Pageant crown
47 Play part
48 Available

DOWN

1 Workout spot
2 Zero
3 One — time
4 Have a breakup
5 Macramé makeup
6 Concerns
7 Gold brick
8 Track shape
9 Capital on the Tiber
10 Forest unit
16 Recipe amt.
18 Boxing punches
19 California neighbor
20 Writer Jaffe
21 "What did you say?"
24 Close
25 Like lemons
26 Paris airport
28 When the beach is biggest
31 Negating link
34 Spotted horse
35 Scots' caps
36 Actor Guinness
37 Mosquito attack
40 Actor Kingsley
42 Wrestling need
43 Important time
44 Pine flow

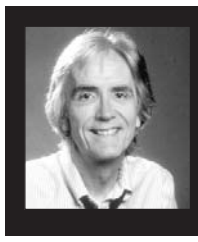
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Saturday's answer



12-10

STUMPED? For answers to today's crossword, call 1-900-454-7377! 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.



NEWS OF THE WEIRD

by Chuck Shepard

Working out is about concentration

• Researchers from the Cleveland Clinic Foundation told a Society for Neuroscience meeting in November in San Diego that their study had found that muscles were strengthened 35 percent and 13 percent, respectively, among two groups of people who merely concentrated on imagining they were exercising (vs. no increase at all by control groups that neither exercised nor imagined exercise).

• In July, Dr. Richard Dye of Half Moon Bay, Calif., was acquitted of sexual assault on female patients despite his admission that he had therapeutically brought at least four women to climax on his examination table during his years as a family practitioner. (Police said he had told them it was "100" women.) Though several woman had made complaints against him, a large contingent of his female patients attended the trial, enthusiastically supporting him.

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100	Employment	400	Real Estate		

BACK PAGE

Renters find themselves shunned and short on places to live

BY JIM WASSERMAN
Associated Press Writer

FOLSOM — A joke in this job-rich, affluent city claims its only affordable rental housing is the state prison.

No wonder. Classified ads show houses renting from $1,125 to $1,900 a month; apartments at $800 and $985.

Such high-end numbers explain how Folsom, like numerous other California cities, attracted a lawsuit, negative publicity and now, the ire of a judge who shut down development.

Folsom has renter trouble — in a state increasingly filled with it.

"It took me five years to get this apartment, a one-bedroom," says Ronald Hallfeldt, a disabled Folsom native.

Hallfeldt, 40, sued his hometown for lacking low-cost rentals.

"My nephew and niece, when they get a place, they get three or more people in a small apartment to share the rent," he says.

"It's kind of like they do in Russia."

In California, where the nation's most expensive rents coexist with people least able to afford them, 14 million people renters may well wonder if they are marked with a scarlet "R." Nothing stirs up single-family homeowners like threats of "multi-family" housing nearby. Apartment wars rage at city halls, pitting needy renters against homeowners fearing for property values and neighborhood schools.

Cities like Indio, Santa Ana and Lancaster, worrying about being overrun with apartments, tried moratoriums.

Booming Moreno Valley sued the Southern California Association of Governments, saying it assigned the city too many rentals.

"We just don't want to be the dumping ground for all the regions with jobs," says John Terell, the city's planning official.

The National Low-Income Housing Coalition reports 350,000 new rental households in California during the 1990s.

But the state built only 281,000 new rentals, says Debra Carlton, vice president of the California Apartment Association.

Now, attorneys are suing California cities that lack rentals for their low-wage workers. Among local governments they claim are settling or negotiating: the cities of Corte Madera, Benicia, Rohnert Park, Oxnard, Folsom and Santa Rosa and Sonoma, Ventura, Riverside and Los Angeles counties.

California housing officials and lawmakers say these battles typically break out in well-to-do suburbs, or neighborhoods where large home lots maintain class distinction in schools and the supermarket.

Mike Rawson, attorney with the California Affordable Housing Law Project calls it "NIMBY on a local government level. We don't want it here. We want it there. Those folks are already there. Why don't you just keep them there."

But battles also break out in poor towns, where residents feel they already have too many renters.

State law requires cities and counties to accept their fair share of cheaper housing. But housing officials find themselves endlessly outmaneuvered trying to enforce it.

"Cities in and of themselves are obstacles to solving the state's housing crisis," says state Sen. Joe Dunn, D-Santa Ana. "A lot of cities maintain the attitude that 'Yes, we have a housing crisis and it should be solved, but somebody else ought to solve it.'"

Dunn, who chairs the Senate Housing and Community Development Committee, says the state's housing law has "no teeth."

Last year he wrote a bill, SB910, to withhold state funds from cities that flout it. He says 15 to 20 percent are chronic stallers.

But cities got his bill sidelined.

In the United States, almost seven in 10 householders live in homes they own, says the National Association of Homebuilders. But in California, home to millions of the nation's most expensive homes, it's closer to five in 10.

That means more renters.

While a recent 2000 Census survey shows the state has plenty more owners than renters, renters are heavily concentrated in urban areas. Rental households dominate nine of California's 11 largest cities; only San Jose and Riverside have home-owning majorities.

"The minute people can get out of rental housing into ownership they want to do it," Teitz says.

But providing for those who can't is complex.

Making room in newer cities, frequently inhabited by people who already escaped crowded urban life, is even harder.

By law, cities and counties aren't required to build affordable rental housing themselves; only zone land for others to do it.

That explains Folsom's legal trouble.

Sacramento Superior Court Judge Lloyd G. Connelly says the city of 53,000 simply hasn't provided enough land for lower-cost rentals. Last month he froze development on 600 acres until the city complies.

"A lot of cities maintain the attitude that 'Yes, we have a housing crisis and it should be solved, but somebody else ought to solve it.'"

— JOE DUNN
California state Senator

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