

Santa Monica Daily Press

A newspaper with issues

Sweet sign



Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press

A parking sign on Georgina Avenue between 11th and 12th streets has been transformed into sweetness. But the Grinch will stuff a ticket in your stocking if you park there today.

Chamber enters political arena

Board votes to endorse candidates, run campaigns

BY ANDREW H. FIXMER
Daily Press Staff Writer

Frustrated with what they call anti-business government, the local chamber of commerce plans to get political — officially.

That means it will organize, recruit and raise money in an effort to oust the city's ruling party — Santa Monicans for Renters Rights.

By endorsing candidates and raising money to run campaigns, the Santa Monica Chamber of

Commerce voted this week to become actively involved getting business-minded people on the City Council.

A Political Action Committee, or PAC, will be formed to raise money to help support candidates supportive of local business concerns. And during elections, the full membership will be allowed to vote on which candidates should get the chamber's endorsement.

"We're not really trying to get political as a chamber," said Linda "Tish" Tisherman, the chamber's president. "We are the business advocates in the community and Santa Monica is not known as a business-friendly

place. And we want to change that and make it better and easier to do business here."

Already the chamber operates a similar PAC for local issues, which was used this year to help coordinate opposition to the proposed living wage law. Voters narrowly defeated the measure at the ballot box on Nov. 5.

The living wage would have raised minimum wages at coastal businesses making \$5 million a year to between \$10.50 and \$12.25 an hour, depending on if benefits were provided. The chamber vehemently opposed the living wage, and coordinated

See CHAMBER, page 5

Parking meter rates may double in downtown Santa Monica

Businesses say move makes city less attractive to shoppers

BY ANDREW H. FIXMER
Daily Press Staff Writer

It's going to take a lot more pocket change to plug the meters in Santa Monica.

Parking meters may be increased from 50 cents to \$1 an

hour downtown and along the beach, and increased from 35 cents an hour to 75 cents at all other locations early next year.

The Santa Monica City Council voted Tuesday to allow city staff to consider raising parking meter fees and bring a formal proposal in February. Approval is required before the new rates would take effect.

And the city plans to install 360 new meters alongside streets adjacent to Santa Monica and Wilshire boulevards, and on Pearl Street near Santa Monica College and John Adams Middle School.

The rate increase at the roughly 6,000 parking meters across the city is expected to bring in \$3

million more annually; \$950,000 of that would come from the raised fees downtown alone.

Installing the new meters would cost about \$340,000 and would generate \$170,000 in their first year of operation and about \$340,000 every year after that, according to city staff.

Beverly Hills, Manhattan Beach, Venice Beach, Hermosa Beach and Westwood already charge \$1 an hour at their parking meters. Same goes for meters along the Sunset Strip and in Old Town Pasadena, according to city staff.

West Hollywood and Redondo Beach charge 75 cents

See METERS, page 6

Woman arrested at Santa Monica hotel for kidnapping two-year-old

By Daily Press staff

A woman who allegedly kidnapped a 2-year-old girl from Los Angeles' Skid Row on Sunday was captured by police at a Santa Monica hotel on Wednesday.

Rochelle Garrett, 29, was arrested by Los Angeles police officers at 9 a.m. at Holiday Motel at Pico Boulevard and 11th Street after she allegedly took Shanyia Payton while she was baby-sitting her.

Police were tipped off by a citizen who saw a news report about the kidnapping and had seen Garrett in Santa Monica. Garrett was supposed to return Payton to her mother at the cor-

ner of Sixth Street and San Pedro Street on Sunday at about 3:30 p.m. When she didn't show up, the mother called police.

Payton was transported to the Central Area Community Police Station in Los Angeles where she was reunited with her mother unharmed.

Garrett, who has several listed addresses in South Central Los Angeles, has been arrested for a similar crime in the past, police said. She was at the hotel with a man when police arrested her.

Garrett was booked for kidnapping. The investigation is continuing and the case will be presented to the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office.



Rochelle Garrett

Activision Inc. shares drop after forecast

By The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Shares of Santa Monica-based Activision Inc. fell sharply Wednesday after the video game maker lowered its fiscal 2003 and 2004 earnings projections, spurring a host of analyst downgrades.

Activision shares traded mid-day Wednesday at \$12.55, down

\$3.18, or 20 percent, on the Nasdaq Stock Market.

Citing weaker-than-expected holiday sales, Activision cut its earnings outlook for the fiscal year ending March 31 to 88 cents a share on revenue of \$823 million, down from \$1.29 a share on revenue of \$934 million, which it projected in October.

See SHARES, page 6

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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)
★★★★ Speak your mind. Have a discussion with a friend, though you might discover the power of being more nurturing with this person later. Recognize how much pressure you're under. Treat yourself accordingly. Be easier and less judgmental. Tonight: Mosey on home. Wrap presents.

♉ TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
★★★ Expenses mount. You might want to consider what you have left to complete. Don't hesitate to ask a partner or friend to brainstorm on how to do it. You might be open to a parent's or boss's feedback. Tonight: Celebrate holiday cheer.

♊ GEMINI (May 21-June 20)
★★★★★ Use the daytime hours to the max. Someone could overwhelm you with how he or she handles a personal matter. Somehow, many of you feel as if you're in a pressure cooker. Distance yourself when you feel the need. Tonight: Play elf.

♋ CANCER (June 21-July 22)
★★★ Be careful during the daylight hours. You might not be sure about your decisions, especially as an associate or partner keeps making a reversal. Do nothing until tomorrow, if possible. Give yourself the space to be confused. Tonight: Do something just for yourself.

♌ LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)
★★★ You are juggling many different concerns. Your ability to handle others comes out. Keep your focus and understand more of what others want and desire. The unexpected occurs under today's Full Moon. Consider being a recluse. Tonight: Listen to others.

♍ VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)
★★★★ Take charge at work. Others pressure you on both fronts. You might very well question what is going on. Understand that the Full Moon is at work. Take a deep breath when you finish the workday, having the knowledge that this too will pass. Tonight: Where your friends are.

♎ LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)
★★★★ Communication flies out of control. You might have your hands full dealing with all the mixed energy. Sort through priorities. Entertain the possibility of screening your calls so that you can focus. Count on this being a long day. Tonight: Out late.

♏ SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)
★★★ Finances easily spin out of control. You could wonder what others expect, as you find the need to put your foot down on spending. You could be uncomfortable with others' choices right now. Step back if you feel a lot is flying out of control. Tonight: Relax your mind.

♐ SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)
★★★★ Others challenge you inadvertently. You might decide to pick up your cookies and head home if you don't like what is happening. Can you avoid great drama? Ultimately, you might be much happier. Tonight: Vanish with a favorite person.

♑ CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)
★★★★ You clearly have had enough, especially if anyone dares to test your limits. The Full Moon emphasizes just how much you do and when a "no" is necessary. Schedule a meeting or a get-together late in the day. Tonight: Where the crowds are.

♒ AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)
★★★★ If you can pull yourself out of the immediate happenings, all the better. Others might simply be cantankerous, but you don't need to become involved. Realize more of your expectations through stepping back. Tonight: Run an errand or two on the way home.

♓ PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)
★★★ You might want to step out of the office and/or home right now. Go off and run some holiday errands. Take a personal day. Pressure builds around these two areas of your life. Use your ingenuity with the remaining holiday details. Tonight: Lighten up.

QUOTE of the DAY

"Marriage is really tough because you have to deal with feelings and lawyers."

— Richard Pryor

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LOCAL



photo courtesy

A woman gathers packages for the homeless as part of 'The Giving Gift' program, which hands out food and clothing.

Holiday 'gift' handouts

By Daily Press staff

As the number of homeless people and families in Los Angeles continues to increase, a group of citizens calling themselves "The Giving Gift" has come together to collect, package and distribute food, toiletries, blankets and clothes to the less fortunate.

On December 14, The Giving Gift began its distribution program at the Brentwood Presbyterian Church and stopped by Santa Monica to hand out large, blue duffle bags filled with essentials.

The Giving Gift began in 1999 when a group of friends in the Los Angeles area decided they were tired of seeing the homeless being ignored. With donations from family and friends, the group put together bags of supplies to hand out. Over the past three years, The Giving Gift has distributed more than 350 bags to homeless men, women and children in the greater Los Angeles area.

Funding for this project comes from donations, and at least 95 cents from each dollar goes toward supplies. Last year, the group raised \$12,000 and helped more than 200 people. This year, The Giving Gift's goal is to raise \$20,000 and reach out to 400 people. For donations or more information, contact Tom Bagamane at (310) 463-1133.

Homeless man arrested for attempted murder

By Daily Press staff

A male transient was arrested for attempted murder Wednesday after he allegedly sliced a man's neck with a box cutter, according to police.

At about 1:30 p.m., Santa Monica police were called to the Ken Edwards Center, on the 1500 block of Fourth Street, because two elderly men were arguing in front of the building.

Police found the victim, who was also a transient, with a two- to three-inch laceration on his neck and bleeding profusely. Santa Monica Fire Department paramedics immediately treated him and transported him to a local hospital, where he was listed in fair condition.

Louis Reed, 71, was found by police hiding in the Ken Edwards Center men's restroom. He was arrested and booked into the Santa Monica Jail. His bail is set at \$500,000.

surf report

Information compiled by Jesse Haley

The surf was big enough earlier this week that you could see the whitecaps of the Venice breakwater from the corner of Windward and Pacific. Redondo had 25-foot waves. Conditions were choppy, and the mix of strong onshore winds and record breaking rainfall added the finishing touch to the biggest storm of the year.

Today we're seeing a decrease in size. Weather reports indicate the rains are over for now.

Unfortunately the damage is already done, and the two inches of rain has done in our chances of surfing in anything resembling clean water.



Today's Tides:

Low-	1:28 a.m.	2.07'
High-	7:40 a.m.	5.84'
Low-	3:05 p.m.	-0.49'
High-	9:25 p.m.	3.53'

Location	Thursday	Friday	Water Quality
County Line	5-7'/Poor	5-7'/Poor	Not available
Zuma	5-7'/Poor	5-7'/Poor	Not available
Surfrider	3-5'/Poor	3-5'/Fair	C
Topanga	4-5'/Fair	4-5'/Fair	A
Breakwater	6-10'/Poor	6-10'/Poor	B
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The Q-Line

As the new year approaches, many Santa Monicans have begun thinking about their New Year's resolutions and setting goals for themselves. And now that our political leaders — some old and some new — have been sworn into office, they are thinking about what their priorities for 2003 will be.

This week, Q-Line wants to know:

"What should your elected leaders focus on as their goals for the upcoming year?"

Call (310) 285-8106 with your response before Thursday at 5 p.m. We'll print it in Friday's paper. Please limit your comments to a minute or less; it might help to think first about the wording of your response.

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OPINION

LETTERS

Garbage trucks need a cleaning

Editor:

They are everywhere, all the time. They can be seen (and certainly heard) at all hours of the day and night, on every street and in every alley in the city. The invasion of the garbage trucks, I call it. Santa Monica has many because of the tremendous amounts of waste generated hereabouts by the many restaurants and hotels concentrated in a small area. The waste removal companies must certainly love the highly profitable situation, and I expect that they bid aggressively for the contracts available to them from the city and private sector. And it may appear that they do a good job, but take a closer look.

The trucks are generally very dirty, loud, stinking from even across the street as they fly by breaking the local speed limits in town, and long in desperate need of a good pressure washing and fresh paint. And their hundreds of permanently parked alley dumpsters? Take a look behind all the restaurants along Main Street a little closer, or about anywhere in the Promenade sector. When's the last time they were taken back to the various waste companies yards and pressure washed or repainted?

It seems to be a problem to me; eyesores and genuine health concerns for the many residents and tourists who travel as pedestrians to and from stores and restaurants on the Promenade and Main Street as well as elsewhere. The waste haulers/garbagepersons themselves may be at some risk being exposed regularly to filthy trucks and dumpsters, which could so easily be cleaned by the companies and repainted to look better in public. It doesn't seem like a lot for the general public to ask for, nor a great expense to bear on the part of these multi-million dollar-a-year companies who do business here. Are there no standards that they can be held to by the city? Perhaps they could be encouraged to do these decent things, make a little change for the better for all concerned — amicably by strong suggestion of City Council members. Otherwise, perhaps they can be fined heavily to do so. Either way, Santa Monica would benefit from companies such as these doing cleaner healthier business/work in the community.

Paul Dryden
Santa Monica

Affordable housing blues

Editor:

So, the city can't meet the 1990 Prop R 30 percent affordable housing mandate?

Well, hell, let's just come up with another socialist, hare-brained idea. Or, as Yale educated, "low-moderate income," rent-control-living Mayor Pro Tem Kevin McKeown says, "... We must revisit our affordable housing policies and make some changes."

Let me help.

Considering the vote for Prop R was taken over a decade ago, and the demographics of Santa Monica have changed dramatically (albeit at the consternation of the socialists and limo liberals in our community), I think the results would be decidedly different. So, let's take another vote on Prop R and see what the results are for today's Santa Monica.

Joan Ling, executive director of Community Corp. of Santa Monica, indicates that two- and three-bedroom apartments are needed to fill the affordable housing needs of families wanting to live in Santa Monica. Why is it that Santa Monica owes "families" an apartment by the beach? And, what the hell is somebody doing with children if they can't afford to pay rent? By the way, I'd like a house for my family north of Montana, Ms. Ling. What can you do for me? Are there any plans for "affordable mansion" programs?

And, finally, Ms. Ling cautions that if we don't keep building affordable housing, "no one will be able to live here unless they make \$200,000 a year and [she] doesn't believe that that's the kind of community any of us wants to see, including those who make \$200,000 a year." Oh, really now? Hum. Let me see. Uh. Nope, she doesn't speak for me. And I would guess that the scientific survey (read: her socio-political-emotional gut) on which she bases her statement doesn't include a sample from those of us who are paying through the nose to live here and are forced to live side by side with people who should be living somewhere else less expensive. By the way, are there any affordable housing units being built north of Montana next to the million dollar properties? Or is this little social experiment just for those of us only making \$199,999 per year or less? Here's a suggestion — those of you "200K plus" people that Ms. Ling "knows" want affordable housing next to their 800K condos, cut a check each year for, oh, I don't know, \$100,000 to her corporation. That should be plenty of money to cover the difference she's in need of. Unless, of course, there really isn't that much support for affordable housing.

Not to worry liberal Santa Monica, if things start to get a little too gentrified for you here, you can always go slumming in Venice!

Tony Street
Santa Monica

A Christmas card list that knows no bounds



TITTINGER'S TAKE

By Michael J. Tittinger

Let's face it, the names on the obligatory Christmas card list aren't always the people we need to speak with this time of year, as we ponder a year well-spent or not, as we look forward to new beginnings with impassioned vigor or outright apathy.

If we were to make a Christmas card list transcending the boundaries of space and time, the limits of life and death, then we would have something! I'm sure our list would take on a vastly different look. We'd be poetic and prolific, writing with passion to the very people that shape us and shake us.

Besides, who is this cousin "Dot" anyway?

Here is my revamped Christmas card list and some messages I'd like to impart:

Dear family, I love you all. See you soon. I'm saving the stamps. I never really understood the practice of sending Christmas cards to those you'll be spending Christmas with anyway. Wasn't the idea to remind people you have lost touch with that you still think of them this time of year? "May the joys of the season warm the cockles of your heart." Well, if

my cockles ain't cookin', it's probably your fault because I'm spending the season with you.

Dear those without families, my heart goes out to you. But please take comfort and joy in the families you have established all around you — be it friends, co-workers, classmates or the man sleeping one storefront over — for family is a subjective term. Blood isn't necessary for love.

Dear those who have lost loved ones, the most joyous season can be the saddest season. Spend it with those still with you. Your loved one would have wanted it that way.

Dear City Council, thank you for working hard at what can seem most days like a thankless job. Please understand that the passion from within the complaining constituents stems from a mutual love for the city by the sea. That said, there won't be any invisible ink pens and notepads in your stockings this year. We demand your full attention.

Dear Carolyn Sackariason (editor of the Daily Press), thanks for being a watchdog of those addressed in my last card (see previous paragraph). Thanks for keeping the city informed and educated and entertained the whole year through. Season's Greetings. Can I have a raise?

Dear studio executives, there is a talented, hungry and ruggedly handsome young screenwriter (if I do say so myself) waiting in the wings of Santa Monica. Act now, for an offer this good shouldn't last. A Christmas filled with promise awaits us

both. Don't be afraid to RSVP.

Dear vagrant outside my heated apartment, I hope you can find the Christmas spirit within us passersby, and we can find it within ourselves. As winter weather descends upon the westside, there should be enough warmth to go around.

Dear apartment complex neighbors, thank you for a year of looking the other way when we pass in the courtyard. Cordial amenities are so 1990s, I guess. I'll bake myself some cookies and welcome me to the neighborhood.

Dear holiday shoppers, here's hoping we can all fight through the fatigue and frustration together. Remember that smiles, laughs, hugs and waves don't cost a thing.

Dear Steve (my landlord), my tub has a leaky faucet.

Dear President George W. Bush, please look deep within to uncover the true justifications for attacking Iraq. If it's a stitch in time to save nine and prevent global treachery, that's one thing; if handing Saddam Hussein's head over to Dad is a proverbial Viagra for senior's impotent legacy following the Persian Gulf War, that is quite another.

Dear Al Gore, thanks for conceding two years before the election, rather than two years after.

Dear Trent Lott, I don't believe "dreaming of a white Christmas" was ever intended to be taken so literally. God help us if you are the leader and we are in your majority. Feliz Navidad.

Dear naked guy masturbating on the beach, thanks for showing my visiting girlfriend the ugly underbelly of Santa Monica last week. Yes, she saw you.

Dear boss who's stewing because I am late while writing this column, keep your pants on, too.

Dear Santa Claus, remember the good old days when all childish concerns could be soothed with a toy wrapped in fancy paper? Happy Christmas to the most selfish man, myth or legend on the planet, for who derives more satisfaction and personal fulfillment than he who devotes his life to serving others?

Dear Jesus, happy birthday, big guy. Take the day and enjoy yourself. God knows, you've earned it. But, remember there is much work still to be done.

Dear Deanna Justine Tittinger, this holiday column is in loving memory of you. No garland or holly can mask the void left at the foot of our Christmas tree. No glittering lights can outshine a church full of simple white candles. No Christmas song can drown out the blue melody that continues to play.

Those who knew and loved you know exactly where to find you this Christmas season. But how do I mail a card addressed "In Care of Heaven?"

Mike Tittinger is a regular columnist who lives in Santa Monica.

Opinions expressed are those of the writer and do not necessarily reflect those of the Santa Monica Daily Press staff. Guest editorials from residents are encouraged, as are letters to the editor. Letters will be published on a space-available basis. It is our intention to publish all letters we receive, except those that are libelous or are unsigned. Preference will be given to those that are e-mailed to sack@smdp.com. All letters must include the author's name and telephone number for purposes of verification. Letters also may be mailed to our offices located at 1427 Third Street Promenade, Suite 202, Santa Monica, 90401, or faxed to (310) 576-9913. All letters and guest editorials are subject to editing for space and content.

LOCAL



Chamber wants more influence on City Council

CHAMBER, from page 1

business interests to oppose it.

However, fresh from their living wage victory, some chamber officials feel as if little had been accomplished since the three incumbents won their seats on the City Council in November.

"If we are going to make Santa Monica business-friendly, we need to do something about City Council," Tisherman said.

Chamber members were recently asked to complete a survey that asked what would most improve Santa Monica, and the political environment was cited as the third major hindrance to local business, behind homelessness and parking and traffic issues, respectively, officials.

Some of the responses blamed the City Council because it "doesn't find balanced solutions," chamber officials said. And they reported receiving responses that said the bureaucracy at City Hall resulted in "numerous business opportunities left on the table, especially for small business, because it is too difficult to get anything accomplished."

The chamber and many business owners complain incessantly about how they are treated by City Hall, both in the slow and arbitrary approval process for developments, as well as creating parking shortages for businesses, specifically car dealerships.

Meanwhile, the City Council has created many preferential parking districts restricting street parking for residents at the expense of nearby businesses, they said.

Mayor Richard Bloom, a member of the city's ruling party, said he was proud of the fact that unlike in other cities, the chamber didn't call the shots politically in Santa Monica.

"I think one of the things that has been the hallmark of Santa Monica political life for past 30 years — and it differentiates us from other communities — is that the chamber doesn't control City Hall," he said. "I don't think that hurts business. You only need to look around our downtown to see that."

It's becoming increasingly more common for local chambers of commerce to get actively involved in the local political process, said Robert Stern, president of West L.A.-based Center for Governmental Studies.

While the reasons for that aren't clear, Stern said their effectiveness varies widely.

"The true test of how successful they are is when voters go to the polls," he said. "Only then will it be clear if what

they want is the same thing voters want."

The chamber's candidates PAC will likely run counter to that of Santa Monicans for Renters Rights, a liberal group that has dominated local politics for decades. While many groups have formed to counter the influence of SMRR, all have disbanded.

However, chamber leaders say they want to avoid their organization from becoming the "anti-SMRR." They said the chamber will vote to endorse ideas and candidates that they think would benefit the city. That means there could be many things both SMRR and the chamber agree on, they said.

"We are not trying to cause any rifts between anybody. We are not saying anything nasty or going to war with anybody."

— LINDA TISHERMAN

Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce, president

"We are not trying to cause any rifts between anybody," Tisherman said. "We are not saying anything nasty or going to war with anybody."

Tisherman said that she just recently called Bloom to congratulate him on being appointed mayor by his peers on the City Council, and to tell him that even though the chamber and the council may not agree on everything, there is no reason both sides can't still work together.

When asked if Bloom is one of the members the chamber would like to unseat on the council, Tisherman paused and replied, "No comment."

Bloom said he told Tisherman during their conversation that it was time for both sides to try to bridge what has become a rift between the business community and City Hall. He agrees that both sides should work together, but he said this latest move isn't the way to accomplish it.

"I don't see how a PAC is going to facilitate that," Bloom said. "I think the community in Santa Monica is smart."

"Voters are smart and they will see what's going on and the chamber will likely find this isn't a positive direction."

Local Sports

Samohi defeats Chaminade in soccer tournament

By Daily Press staff

The Vikings finished the last game of the Westside/South Bay Tournament on Tuesday with a convincing win against Chaminade. The Samo attack scored early and by the half they were up 6-0. Goals were scored by seniors Josh Rodriguez and Alex Farivar, as well as juniors Ryan Natale, Carlos Lopez, and Andrew Martinez, and sophomore Omid Shokoufandeh.

The Vikings will play on Friday against San Clemente at the South Torrance Holiday Tournament.

The Vikings are 5-2 overall.

DIVORCE LAW

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LOCAL

First meter increase in 11 years may be approved

METERS, from page 1

an hour at their meters, while in West L.A. it costs 50 cents an hour to park at a meter. "This is not out of line with what neighboring and other municipalities charge," said Councilman Mike Feinstein. "In order to resolve our daunting budget deficit so as not to undermine city services, we're going to have to make cuts and raise revenues."

He added, "We can't do it by doing just one or the other — it has to be both."

However, Councilman Bob Holbrook — who cast the lone vote against raising parking meters — said the city should do more to cut its spending before it raises fees.

"I think we have gone overboard," he said, "and we are sending the wrong message to people."

He also said he disagrees with raising rates higher than those found in areas of Los Angeles that surround Santa Monica on three sides.

"Why collect more money this way?" Holbrook asked. "We are already getting a reputation as being a place that's too expensive to go shopping."

The last time parking meter rates were increased was in 1991, and the recent downtown parking task force recommended last year raising parking meter rates as one of several sources to pay for downtown parking improvements.

And as part of the transit mall construction, the city installed new computerized meters where motorists pay at one central location, decreasing the number of posts on the curb.

The city also is proposing that the newer meters replace the city's existing mechanical meters because they are more durable and allow motorists to buy parking debit cards in advance.

"I think we have gone overboard, and we are sending the wrong message to people."

— **BOB HOLBROOK**
Santa Monica City Councilman

Modernizing the parking meters would cost about \$2.4 million, and it would be paid for from the parking meter increase, city officials said.

The Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce opposes raising the parking meter fees. Officials say the higher parking fees may translate to fewer people coming to the city to dine or go shopping during already sour economic times locally.

"We thought the timing (of this decision) was particularly awful with only a few days left before Christmas," said Kathy Dodson, executive director of the chamber of commerce. "It may not take effect for some time, but it just comes across to the public that Santa Monica is going to double its rates while you can park for free during the holidays in Beverly Hills or Redondo Beach."

Weak holiday sales hurt local video game maker

SHARES, from page 1

The company expects 2004 earnings of 80 cents a share on revenue of \$823 million, down from its October forecast of \$1.35 a share on revenue of more than \$1 billion.

Wall Street's reaction was swift. Deutsche Bank cut Activision to "hold" from "buy," while Gerard Klauer Mattison cut the company's rating to "underperform" from "buy." Jefferies & Co. cut it to "hold" from "accumulate" and Bear Stearns & Co. cut Activision to "peer perform" from "outperform."

Gerard Klauer analyst Edward Williams said Activision doesn't have any near-term catalyst to drive the stock up.

He added that the company's portfolio of brands, which includes video

games Tony Hawk, Castle Wolfenstein and Spider-Man, has been greatly diminished. While "Tony Hawk 4" has been a top-selling title, it couldn't offset the weak sales of such other games as "X-Men: Next Dimension," and "Minority Report," Williams said.

Analyst Stewart Halpern of RBC Capital Markets, who lowered his rating to "sector perform" from "outperform," gave Activision credit for its willingness to revamp its product line.

Rival video game maker Take-Two Interactive Software Inc. on Tuesday posted a fiscal fourth-quarter profit, thanks to blockbuster sales of its "Grand Theft Auto: Vice City" game. On Wednesday, Jefferies & Co. upgraded Take-Two to "buy" from "accumulate."

Santa Monica Daily Press

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STATE



Governor projects budget shortfall will hit \$30B

By The Associated Press

SACRAMENTO — Gov. Gray Davis' top financial advisers predict California's budget deficit could reach a staggering \$30 billion — more than a third the size of the state's general fund — over the next 18 months, Davis said Wednesday.

Republicans have said they will block any budget plans that include raising taxes. But Davis said the deficit is "just too big a gap to close" without tax hikes, and said he wants lawmakers to put aside "rigid ideology."

Davis has been hinting for weeks that the shortfall would far exceed the \$21 bil-

lion estimated last month by legislative analysts in making his case for deep cuts and possibly tax increases.

He divulged the expected shortfall Wednesday on Los Angeles radio station KFVB-AM. Later Wednesday, Davis was to conduct a conference call with the top five leaders of the state Legislature from both parties and then planned a news conference to officially reveal the deficit.

Davis has proposed \$10.2 billion in cuts over the next 18 months — which include about \$3.4 billion from the current \$98.9 billion budget and savings and cuts of almost \$7 billion in the coming budget year that begins July 1.

L.A. top managers, nonunion workers get 4 percent raises

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Without public discussion, the City Council voted to award 4 percent pay raises to top managers and 9,000 other nonunion municipal workers.

The council on Tuesday approved the salary package, which will cost \$6 million and includes raises that hike the salaries of 15 general managers above \$200,000 by 2004 and for the first time boost one city official's salary to more than \$300,000.

City officials said the 4 percent cost-of-living raises, retroactive to July 2001, are relatively small and well-deserved.

Inflation has been 2.2 percent since November 2001, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and in January.

Some taxpayer advocates said the amounts, especially for general managers, seemed excessive, especially at a time when the state and city are facing budget shortages.

"That's outrageous," said Jon Coupal, president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association. "When the state is going to have to lay off people and local governments are screaming at the state, saying don't touch our money, for them to be giving any raises at all is extraordinarily inappropriate."

Dad of California boy genius gets three years probation

By The Associated Press

SANTA CRUZ — Agustin De Mello, the troubled father of a boy genius who graduated from college at age 11, has received three years probation for gunshots he fired during an armed standoff with police in 2001.

De Mello, 73, was convicted on a felony gun charge. His trial had been delayed and later postponed because he suffers from bladder cancer, once thought by prosecutors to be terminal. De Mello has since undergone radiation therapy and surgery.

Prosecutors decided to resume their case against him after learning that he was felling well enough to sign on to teach a karate seminar in Massachusetts. De

Mello is accomplished in martial arts, flamenco guitar and has lifted weights competitively for years.

De Mello called authorities on March 15, 2001, saying he was suffering from a long illness and that he wanted to die. When police went to his home, he refused to let them in. Officers kicked in his door and shots were fired. An injured officer later was found to have been grazed by a bullet fired by another officer.

De Mello and his son, Adragon, became the center of a national debate in the 1980s over parents pushing children toward academic achievement. Adragon graced magazine covers for his academic achievements after he graduated with a degree in computational mathematics at age 11.

Celebrity private detective indicted on weapons charges

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A private detective to the stars, accused of being linked to a threat against a reporter investigating an alleged Mafia extortion plot against Steven Seagal, was indicted on federal weapons charges for having hand grenades and plastic explosives at his office.

The indictment handed down Tuesday charges Anthony Pellicano, 59, with a felony charge relating to the grenades and a misdemeanor charge for unlawfully storing military C-4 explosives, authorities said. If convicted of both charges, Pellicano faces up to 11 years in prison.

Pellicano, who has worked for Elizabeth Taylor and Michael Jackson, was arrested last month after a man charged with threatening a Los Angeles Times reporter told an FBI informant he had been hired by Pellicano, who allegedly was acting on behalf of Seagal.

The reporter, who had been researching an alleged extortion plot against the actor, found a dead fish and a note with the word "STOP" on her car. The car's windshield was smashed.

Pellicano, freed on \$400,000 bail, denied any involvement in the threat. Seagal also denied any role.

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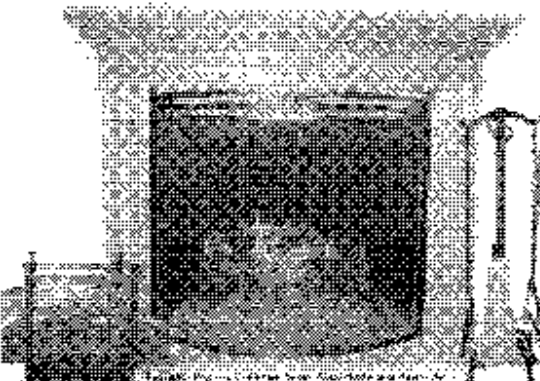
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STATE

Southern California bracing for more storms

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Southern California residents are bracing for the next wave of deadly storms to move through the area later this week as they recover from a deluge that brought record levels of rain and contributed to the state's death toll.

Forecasters said heavy rains could return to Southern California late Thursday or early Friday.

The storm that whipped through the region earlier this week knocked out power lines, caused mudslides and flooded streets. Its lingering effects were felt Tuesday with strong winds, scattered showers and snowfall that forced the closure of Interstate 5 through the Grapevine.

At least five people were killed in storm-related accidents in Southern California. Three women were killed and two others were rescued as they tried to cross a storm-swollen creek when a surge of water swept their car off a narrow farm road. The two women who survived Monday's accident managed to get out of the vehicle that overturned.

The San Diego County Medical Examiner's Office identified the victims as: Rosa Maria Marcos Santos, 40; Guillermina Hernandez Ramos, 21; and Maria Isabel Melquiades Mora, 24.

The two surviving women — Maria Garcia, 29, and Lucia Gomez, 25 — were treated at a hospital and released.

Brandon Webb told the San Diego Union-Tribune and the Los Angeles Times that he warned the women not to drive across the creek but it was not clear whether the women, who did not speak English, understood him.

Also on Monday, a three-vehicle accident involving a tour bus killed two and injured 23. A truck driver, Felipe Palomo, 49, of Indio, and the driver of a Honda, Hugo Godoy, 41, of Perris died on Highway 60 after Palomo's vehicle swerved and hit the Honda. Godoy's car was struck by the bus carrying 23 passengers, all of whom suffered minor to moderate injuries.

Monday's storm brought needed water to a drought-stricken state. Nearly two inches of rain fell in downtown Los Angeles, which broke a daily record set in 1940. About two inches of snow fell above 5,000 feet in Los Angeles County while the mountain areas saw at least a foot of fresh snow.

Mudslides also were expected to be a problem because of heavy rains and a series of fires over the summer that left many foothills charred. At least two mudslides brought trouble to roads in the San Gabriel Mountains, where the Williams fire burned more than 38,000 acres in September.

Forecasters said the storms may continue for weeks or even months. The tropical Pacific has been warmed by El Nino, the weather phenomenon that periodically drenches California with heavy winter rains.

Girl says she was thrown out of class because she is lesbian

By The Associated Press

BANNING — The family of a 15-year-old girl has filed a federal civil rights lawsuit against the Banning Unified School District after a teacher allegedly kicked the girl out of gym class because she was a lesbian.

The suit filed Tuesday in U.S. District Court in Riverside alleges the school district violated the state and U.S. constitutional rights of the student, Ashly Massey. It seeks changes in school policies to handle harassment of students based on sexual orientation, as well as unspecified monetary damages. The suit was filed by the American Civil Liberties Union and the National Center for Lesbian Rights on behalf of Ashly's family.

Named as defendants in the suit are the Banning district, the superintendent, the principal and then-vice principal of Coombs Middle School, and Karen Gill, the physical education teacher who allegedly threw Ashly out of class.

Coombs Middle School Dean of Students Bryan James said the school was aware of the allegation.

"We don't know this to be true, but if it is true, it's wrong," James said.

Ashly, who confirmed she is a lesbian, said only a few friends knew her sexual orientation last March when a classmate asked her if she was gay while the students were in a locker room. Ashly said another student didn't wait for her answer, loudly blurring out: "She's a lesbian!"

The teen claims her gym teacher told her that, "Nobody needs to know that." That same evening, the teacher allegedly called the girl's mother and said some of

the students felt uncomfortable with Ashly being in the locker room, the lawsuit claims.

Although the teacher said Ashly never acted inappropriately, the next day the girl was told to report to the principal's office instead of gym class, the lawsuit alleges. Ashly sat in the principal's office during gym period for 1 1/2 weeks, the suit said. The girl claims she was never told why she was barred from class or whether she was being punished.

Roger Wolfertz, deputy general counsel for the California Department of Education, said it appeared that the girl's rights were violated.

"Just because this person is a disclosed homosexual it would be illegal to kick her out of the class just for that," he said.

Ashly said as word spread about her sexual orientation that she was targeted by classmates who hurled insults at her. Her name was even sprayed in hateful graffiti around the school, she said.

Her family moved to nearby Beaumont this summer but for reasons that had nothing to do with the alleged discrimination.

About 78 percent of teens report that kids who are gay or thought to be gay are teased and bullied in their schools and communities, according to a new National Mental Health Association survey.

Ashly hopes that coming forward and talking about the incident would inspire other youths who feel they are subjected to discrimination.

"I hope other kids see me standing up," she said, "and maybe they'll take a stand too. Nobody should have to hide who they are."

NATIONAL



Teenagers help homeless teenagers at Christmas

BY SEVIL HUNTER

Reno Gazette-Journal

RENO, Nev. — Lexey Smrt has a lot of stuff inside her bedroom. Stuffed animals, clothing. You name it, she's got it. The Galena High School freshman recently decided most of it had to go. When she learned of Children in Transition, a districtwide program that helps homeless students, Smrt quickly cleared her room.

To Smrt's surprise, Galena High had a chapter. She knew her teddy bears would be appreciated by another teen. She wanted to give a classmate something to hold through the hardship.

"I'm happy to do it," the 14-year-old said. "I know it will all go to a good heart."

For 25 students at Galena High, their school is the only permanent address they know. For now, they live day to day out of a backpack. Some have parents who have split up, died, become terribly ill, been sent to jail or have gone into debt. Others do not know why their parents abandoned them. For 1,086 other children in the Washoe County School District, school has become their place of stability, safety and security.

"Children come to these schools in many different ways. Sometimes, it's where their parents first parked their car," said Gloria Bratiosis, the district's homeless liaison. "We try to keep the child stable in the school they started out at while their family gets settled."

The district provides transportation for homeless children who represent less than 1 percent of the student population. Each year, the numbers rise.

School officials consider students who do not have a regular, adequate nighttime residence as homeless. The numbers also include runaways, students who live with relatives or children of migrant families who are unable to afford permanent housing.

"There isn't a school in our district that hasn't had a child in need," Bratiosis said. "The needs continue yearlong. Needs are just as important in September as they are at Christmas."

To help transitional students through the holidays, classmates are pitching in to making it special:

■ At Westergard Elementary School, children are collecting hats and mittens.

■ Children at Van Gorder Elementary adopted Kate Smith Elementary to help through the 2002-2003 school year. They have been collecting coats, clothing, hats and mittens.

■ Fifth- and sixth-graders at Sparks Beasley Elementary are gathering soap, shampoo, tooth brushes and vitamins.

■ North Valleys High School's teens placed their own Angel Tree in the lobby for needy families in their school.

At Galena High, students are busy getting their giving under way.

"You would never think of Galena, with its high income and million-dollar homes, as having teens homeless or in need, but we do," said Kim Beneschott, a Galena counselor and the high school's Children in Transition coordinator. "There are many programs for students in elementary and middle schools, but there's nothing for the high-school level."

When the high school's ROTC students learned of the need, they quickly earmarked \$100 they raised to benefit the charity. This week, students walked in to counseling offices with bags filled with donated goods. Coaches cleared their closets and handed over unused coats.

Inside Galena's choir room, volunteers gathered to sort out sweat shirts, T-shirts, toys, soaps, socks, books and other items to be stuffed inside new backpacks. Volunteers folded, stacked and bagged for hours so that a teen in need could receive a Christmas gift. Teens will be able to enter the choir room and select donated items to give to their siblings, parent, or relatives. Volunteers like Smrt planned worked the weekend to turn the choir room into a mini-Santa gift shop.

"When they get their gifts, it will say from your Galena Family," Beneschott said. "Not only are we helping teens, but we're giving them a sense of empowerment by letting them pick their own gifts. This program keeps their dignity and anonymity. At the same time, it gives the kids who have much a chance to see the other side."

Kalli Mannos, 15, helped coordinate this year's drive.

Boxes reading 'FEAR' led to subway station evacuation

By The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Menacing boxes that led police to evacuate one of the city's busiest subway stations and call out the bomb squad were just part of an art class project, a student says.

Clinton Boisvert was arrested after admitting to police that he painted the word "FEAR" on 37 boxes and placed them inside the bustling subway station at Union Square.

It was his way of meeting an assignment for the School of Visual Arts, said Boisvert, who was released on his own recognizance Tuesday.

Boisvert, 25, was charged with reckless endangerment, a misdemeanor punishable by up to a year in jail, and disorderly conduct.

The scare happened Dec. 11 when a

police sergeant spotted one of the shirt-box-sized boxes in a stairwell. Others — some painted black, some wrapped in electrical tape — were found on platforms, and attached to walls, benches and floors.

The station was closed for nearly six hours while officers determined that the boxes were empty.

Boisvert's lawyer, Bill Stampur, said the student was trying to complete in an interesting way an assignment for a course he was taking.

Boisvert's teacher said the assignment was for placement of art. Sculpture teacher Barbara Schwartz wouldn't say how his effort would be graded, but told The New York Post he received an "A" for the semester.

The school probably won't discipline Boisvert, said spokesman Adam Eisenstat.



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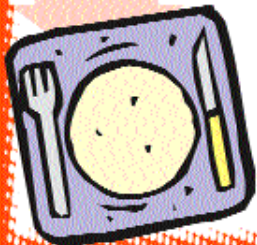
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**NATIONAL**

Federal regulators strengthens protections against telemarketers

BY DAVID HO
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Federal regulators are creating new protections for people plagued by unwanted telemarketing calls, establishing a national "do-not-call" list that consumers can use to keep their phones from ringing with sales pitches.

Federal Trade Commission officials said that under the strengthened rules telemarketers also must transmit identifying information that can be viewed by services like Caller ID and limit the number of "abandoned" calls that hang up or leave people listening to silence on the line.

The regulations were being made public Wednesday.

The national do-not call registry, first proposed in January, would allow people to stop sales calls made from outside their state. Consumers who register on the Internet or with one call to a toll-free government number would remain on the list for five years before having to renew, FTC officials said.

Officials said the agency is taking bids from companies interesting in creating the registry.

Once the list is operating, telemarketers will have to check the registry every three months to find out who doesn't want to be called, the officials said. Telemarketers who call listed people could be fined up to \$11,000 for each violation.

The registry will likely cost about \$16 million in its first year and would be paid for with fees collected from telemarketers, officials said. The agency has not decided how those fees will be imposed and still needs congressional approval to collect them.

Louis Mastria, a spokesman for the Direct Marketing Association, which represents telemarketers, said the new rules are unlawful and the group is considering challenging the FTC in court. He said the do-not-call list endangers the jobs of some of the industry's 4 million workers, many of them single parents and students.

Rep. Edward Markey, D-Mass., praised the do-not-call list, saying it "will provide consumers with a powerful new tool."

"Hopefully by this time next year the only thing consumers will hear ringing during supper will be sleigh bells or jingle bells and not the jangling phone," said Markey, the top Democrat on the House Commerce Committee's telecommunications and Internet panel.

There are exceptions to the FTC's do-not-call protections.

A company can call someone on the list if that person has bought, leased or rented something from the seller within 18 months. Telemarketers also can call consumers if they have inquired or applied for something during the last three months.

The FTC also has limited authority to police certain industries — such as telephone companies — that fall under the jurisdiction of the Federal Communications Commission. The FCC is considering its own do-not-call registry.

The two agencies would have to work together to cover all telemarketers unless Congress gives more authority to one.

Charities are exempt from the FTC's do-not-call list, but third-party telemarketers who call on their behalf are bound by rules that require them to obey when consumers ask to be put on a do-not-call list, officials said.

Another new restriction on telemarketers involves machines called predictive dialers. The machines dial numbers stored in a database and predict when a telemarketer will be ready to finish one sales call and start another. When the machine reaches a person, the call is supposed to be transferred to a telemarketer who is just finishing another call.

The system doesn't always work and calls are made before a telemarketer is available. With these "abandoned" calls, a consumer on the other end picks up their phone only to be disconnected or greeted with a long silence before the sales pitch begins.

The new rules limit abandoning — calls that hang up or have pauses longer than two seconds — to less than 3 percent of a telemarketer's business, agency officials said. The FTC also is requiring sellers to play an identifying recording after two seconds if no operator is available.

Woman indicted for allegedly defrauding 9-11 relief funds

By The Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — A woman who allegedly received nearly \$64,000 after falsely claiming her brother was killed in the World Trade Center attack was indicted on federal fraud charges Wednesday.

The 10-count indictment accuses Cassandra Montgomery, 41, of mail fraud and of filing a false missing persons report for Jeffrey Montgomery, who authorities say does not exist.

Montgomery, of St. Joseph, claimed the nonexistent brother had gone into the World Trade Center the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, to apply for a job at bond brokerage Cantor Fitzgerald, according to the indictment.

Prosecutors said Montgomery contacted

charities and submitted false documentation to them as proof of her brother's existence and death. She allegedly received money from the American Red Cross, The September 11 Fund, Safe Horizon, Inc., and the Robin Hood Relief Fund.

"Those who died in the World Trade Center disaster are American heroes," U.S. Attorney Todd Graves said. "We will do everything in our power to protect their memory. This case is a top priority."

Montgomery was jailed Wednesday and couldn't be reached for comment. It wasn't immediately clear if she had obtained an attorney.

The name of Jeffrey Montgomery was removed last week from the list of victims of the terrorist attacks, as were two others who were erroneously reported missing.

INTERNATIONAL



The question pondered is: Why war against Iraq?

BY DEBORAH HASTINGS

AP National Writer

In the season of peace, at the Christmas-card perfect Bavarian village constructed in Chicago's Daley Plaza, David Mack talked approvingly of war.

"Yes, I think a war is coming, and yes. I think it's justified," said the 39-year-old businessman, as his wife and children enjoyed the creche and immense Christmas tree.

"I think it's needed to put a stop to what's going on in Iraq — with the nuclear weapons and all that. They're just building up and building up ammunition on us, hoping to catch us asleep. I think now's the time to act," Mack said.

More than 1,700 miles away, Los Angeles transit worker James Coleman wasn't so sure. "I haven't seen a single

reason to risk all the lives that are going to be lost," he said, outside a subway station in the city's Koreatown district.

On the eve of Christmas and the promise of a new year, the United States girds for war. And its people question, protest or rely on faith in elected leaders — while contemplating the hard truth that if we go after Iraq, sons and daughters will kill for their country and die for it.

President Bush says he possesses hard evidence that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction. But the president has yet to publicly disclose it, and many Americans are leery of war.

According to a poll published this week by the Los Angeles Times, 90 percent say they don't doubt Iraq is developing those weapons. But without new evidence from U.N. inspectors, 72 percent — and 60 percent of Republicans — said the

president has not provided enough evidence to justify starting a war.

The same poll — which had a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points — found a decline in support for a ground attack in Iraq, from more than 70 percent in January to 64 percent in August to 58 percent last week.

Americans favor getting rid of Saddam Hussein, said Dan Glickman, director of the Institute of Politics at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, but they are unwilling to do so without evidence that he poses a real threat to this country.

"People are going to start asking, 'Show me the evidence.' If you're going to risk American lives, you have to start answering those questions," said Glickman, a former Democratic congressman and secretary of agriculture.

And though most Americans know about Saddam's invasion of Kuwait and use of chemical weapons against his own people, Glickman says past actions do not prove current threats.

"Saddam is not the most lovable creature in the world. But you have to demonstrate that the danger is real and it is imminent," he said.

Said Stephen Hess, senior fellow at the Washington-based Brookings Institution: "Bush can't just declare war, he has to explain it. Because of the Gulf War, people know about Saddam Hussein, so from that point of view, the president has an easy sell."

In fact, more than 11 years after the first battle with Saddam during the first Bush presidency, some Americans see a second Gulf War as an inevitable continuation of the first.

"What the father started, the son wants to finish," said Antonio Maldonado, an 18-year-old freshman at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. "That's basically it, you know. It's part of the Bush legacy."

Retired Air Force Sgt. Daniel Kisco, his red truck decorated with Old Glory and dozens of pro-U.S. bumper stickers, said Saddam has been allowed to flout international restrictions on his country's military arsenal for too long.

"We need to get in there and kick some butt," said the Winter Springs, Fla., resident. "The president understands that we

have to get in there and show the world that we aren't going to take their crap anymore. He just wants to make sure that we maintain our authority."

In Indianapolis, at Buzz Smith's military surplus store, where a poster of Uncle Sam greets the customers and conspiracy theories are as common as discount gas masks, there are no doubts: Saddam is a master of international terrorism, and war is both inevitable and necessary.

"Iraq is the kingpin of it all," Smith said.

But there has been a vocal opposition, in protests from Washington state to Washington, D.C., in numbers not often seen since the Vietnam War. Demonstrators carrying signs reading "No Blood for Oil" and shouting "No war with Iraq," descended on Vice President Dick Cheney's house in the nation's capital and heckled President Bush during a visit this fall to Trenton, N.J.

On Sunday, Chicago's top Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders led about 1,000 worshippers in an anti-war candlelight march. Religious groups — including Bush's own denomination, the United Methodist Church, and America's Roman Catholic bishops — have opposed any war.

The National Council of Churches, representing 36 Protestant denominations and 50 million Christians, bought a page in The New York Times imploring Bush to abandon military action. Common Cause also took out an ad challenging the president's position; among the signers were broadcaster Walter Cronkite, historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and former New York Gov. Mario Cuomo.

Current governors, for the most part, have voiced little opposition. California's Gray Davis — who decided he was a Democrat after serving in Vietnam and seeing war's disproportionate impact on the poor — nonetheless supports the president.

"I know that when you are on duty halfway across the world, you want to know that your country and your president are going to stand behind you," Davis said in a televised interview.

And Congress, after initial skepticism from Republicans and Democrats, gave the Bush administration its approval to pursue military action against Iraq after closed-door intelligence briefings and public hearings.

Turmoil in Venezuela



Howard Yanes/Associated Press

Police officers scuffle with opposition demonstrators blocking a street in Caracas, Wednesday. Opposition demonstrators blocked major highways and roads Wednesday, paralyzing parts of the capital in a strike against President Hugo Chavez's rule that has strangled Venezuela's critical oil industry.

Indian women in Mexican villages fight against alcoholism

BY JULIE WATSON

Associated Press Writer

SAN RAFAEL TAMPAXAL, Mexico — As the Corona beer truck with its clinking bottles lumbered into this Indian village in the mountains of central Mexico, angry women ran out of their homes, shouting: "Get out! Get out!"

The women, many carrying babies in colorful shawls tied around their hips, forced the driver back down the mountain before he could unload a single bottle — much to the chagrin of their husbands.

Fed up with their men stumbling home drunk or falling over in a stupor in their cornfields, the women of this remote Indian village in San Luis Potosi state took matters into their own hands, refusing to allow any more alcohol to be sold in their community of 250 people.

Huasteco women traditionally don't drink alcohol and rarely hold positions of power. Huastecos are also called Teenek after their language.

The women's defiance has spread like wildfire through these lush mountains. Since their bold stand more than a year

ago, women in at least 10 Huasteco Indian villages have gotten their leaders to ban alcohol and another dozen communities are considering it.

"A lot of men are not happy with this," said Marcelina Martinez, who helped turn back the truck from San Rafael. "They seem sad. But, oh well. At least now they spend time with their families, so in the end things are better. They didn't want to listen to us, so we had to get angry."

Over the past decade, Huasteco women have taken on a greater role in their communities as more men leave to find work, often in the United States.

Many women now manage the family budget — something that may have led to the alcohol bans, some say. The region relies heavily on coffee, and growers are earning much less amid plummeting world prices.

"Before, if a man arrived home drunk, his kids could run over and find something in his bag. But now, the little bit that men make, they spend on drinking and it's affecting the children," said Sabas Estrada, whose village of Santa Rita, down the mountain from San Rafael, is

considering banning alcohol.

Women say they also found support from the region's new government. President Vicente Fox's National Action Party took power in the Huasteco Indian's most populous municipality, Aquismon, two years ago and has cracked down on moonshine.

The cane-based liquor, known as aguardiente or yuco, flows like the rivers through these mountains, which are surrounded by sugarcane fields. A popular Huasteco song proclaims aguardiente the best liquor because all get drunk, including the mayor and even the governor.

National Action authorities have set up roadside checkpoints and raids on illegal distilleries. During a recent week, officials nabbed 2,900 gallons of bootleg.

"Moonshine sellers around here are as powerful a mafia as drug traffickers," said Raul Hernandez, the alcohol inspector of Aquismon. "There are hundreds making it in their villages, in their homes, in out-houses, even in caves."

Liquor is an integral part of Indian ceremonies in Mexico. Like many tribes, Huastecos pour alcohol on the ground as an

offering to Mother Earth before planting.

At festivals honoring each village's patron saint, men dance to the traditional music of violins and guitars and then drink until dawn.

Women rarely drink, even at festivals, but they recognize alcohol as an important part of their traditions. Because of that, most dry towns lift their bans during celebrations. Some even allow families to serve liquor at birthday parties and weddings.

But inspectors acknowledge such allowances have complicated attempts to control alcohol use.

"When we go to their homes and find beer, they always say, 'Well, it's for a birthday party.' But I say, 'You can't be having a birthday every day,'" said Isidoro Hernandez, Las Armas village commissioner.

Not all agree with the bans.

"Alcohol has its positive aspects. For one, it's the only drug that the government has legalized," said Ruben Hernandez, a San Rafael school teacher. "But now a campesino can lose his liver by being pulled over on the road."



SPORTS

Judge: Bonds ball must be sold, proceeds split

BY IAN STEWART
Associated Press Writer

SAN FRANCISCO — And Barry Bonds' record home run ball belongs to ... Nobody.
Not Alex Popov.
Not Patrick Hayashi.
But they'll still get something from it.
Judge Kevin McCarthy ruled Wednesday that neither Popov nor Hayashi could claim ownership of the historic ball, hit by Bonds for his 73rd home run on the last day of the 2001 season at Pac Bell Park.

Instead, McCarthy told them to sell it and split the money — perhaps more than \$1 million.

Since it landed in the stands 14 months ago, the ball has been locked in legal limbo and a safe-deposit box.

With Solomonic wisdom, the judge ruled that Popov — who gloved the ball for an instant — and Hayashi — who ended up with the ball — each has a legitimate claim and neither should get the ball outright.

"Their legal claims are of equal quality, and they are equally entitled to the ball," McCarthy ruled. "The ball must be sold and divided equally between the parties."

"In the market condition right now, I think it will sell for more than \$1 million. It could very well reach \$1.5 million or \$2 million."

— LOU CONSTANZO
Real Legends, vice president of sales

Lou Constanzo, vice president of sales for sports memorabilia auctioneers Real Legends, said the court battle increased the value of the ball.

"In the market condition right now, I think it will sell for more than \$1 million," Constanzo said. "It could very well reach \$1.5 million or \$2 million."

The judge made a point of saying that if he awarded the ball solely to Hayashi, it could send the wrong message to fans about civility in the stands.

"This case demands vindication of an important principle," he said. "We are a nation governed by law, not by brute force."

The judge acknowledged Popov was "set upon by a gang of bandits who dislodged the ball" in a scramble in the stands. But McCarthy added that Popov never demonstrated full possession and could not be awarded sole ownership.

The judge made it clear Hayashi did nothing wrong and was not part of that gang. Hayashi said clearing his name was the most satisfying part of the ruling. He estimated his legal bills will far exceed \$100,000.

"This whole process, from Day 1, I have been accused of doing some wrongdoing, that I was the person out there attacking people," he said. "And that's not true, that was not true. I was out there just like everybody else. I got pushed to the ground."

Popov was less satisfied with the ruling, maintaining he was robbed of the ball. He said the judge's decision "just shows that mob rule and violence can prevail."

Much of the case turned on a matter of fractions of seconds caught on television videotape.

TV news video showed the ball in Popov's glove for at least six-tenths of a second before he was enveloped by a crowd. Both sides agreed the videotape showed the ball in Popov's glove. They couldn't agree on what defines possession — Popov's split-second catch or Hayashi's final grab.

Last month, McCarthy repeatedly asked the lawyers for a definition of "possession."

Popov contended he held the ball longer than a split second before it was taken from his glove. Hayashi said Popov dropped it before hitting the pavement.

During closing arguments McCarthy described a "gray area" between securely catching the ball and never touching it. Hayashi's lawyers insisted the case was a simple question of property law.

McCarthy deliberated for a month after hearing closing arguments in late November.

Tennis players must take EPO tests starting in 2003

BY HOWARD FENDRICH
AP Tennis Writer

Tennis players must take random blood tests to check for the banned endurance-enhancing substance EPO starting next month.

"We will have blood tests both out of competition and at tournaments," ATP Tour vice president David Higdon said Wednesday.

The plan to test for EPO — short for erythropoietin, which raises the oxygen-carrying capacity of blood — was presented to players at Wimbledon last summer.

A player council met two days before the start of the U.S. Open and indicated it was in favor of EPO testing.

"We informed our players through mailings, a weekly newsletter. They've all been briefed quite extensively on this process," Higdon said.

Still, players will be reminded of the change at a meeting in Melbourne, Australia, on Jan. 11, two days before the Australian Open starts.

Players already are tested for recre-

ational drugs and steroids.

The WTA and ATP, plus the International Tennis Federation — which oversees the four Grand Slam tournaments, the Davis Cup and Fed Cup — did 1,400 drug tests in 2002, "somewhere between 25-to-50 percent more than the year before," Higdon said.

About 100 men were tested away from tournaments this year, double the number in 2001. That should rise again, he said.

"It will definitely be more next year," Higdon said. "How much it is, I don't know that."

In the past two years, Argentine players Juan Ignacio Chela and Guillermo Coria have tested positive for banned substances. Chela was suspended for three months, Coria for seven.

Petr Korda, who won the 1998 Australian Open, tested positive for the steroid nandrolone at Wimbledon later that year. He was banned for a year.

EPO has been viewed as the drug of choice in such sports as cycling and cross-country skiing.

Timberwolves beat Lakers



Ann Heisenfelt/Associated Press

Minnesota Timberwolves forward Kevin Garnett (21) yells to a teammate as he looks to pass around Los Angeles Lakers forward Robert Horry (5) in the first quarter in Minneapolis, Tuesday. Garnett scored a game-high 23 points as the Timberwolves beat the Lakers 96-80.

Vesco, motorcycle land-speed record-holder, dies at 63

By The Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — Don Vesco, a land-speed record-holder for motorcycles and cars, has died. He was 63.

Vesco died Monday in Scripps Mercy Hospital of prostate cancer.

He set 18 motorcycle and six automobile records during a career that started when he was 16. Among his achievements is the current wheel-driven land-speed record of 458.44 mph.

The world land-speed record for all cars is 763.085 mph, set in 1997 by Andy Green in a car powered by two jet engines.

In 1970, Vesco was the first person to ride a motorcycle at more than 250 mph.

Five years later, he broke the 300-mph barrier on his Silver Bird Yamaha, powered by twin Yamaha TZ750 engines. In 1978, he increased the record to 318 mph on a Kawasaki turbo, a standard that stood for 12 years.

Vesco did most of his tests on the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah, where he was instrumental in the "Save the Salt" effort.

Vesco had his share of high-speed spills, including a 1986 accident that sent his car 30 feet in the air and broke his neck. He also lost an eye when he was hit by a rock while watching a sprint car race in 1996.

Vesco was inducted into the Motorcycle Hall of Fame in 1999.

COMICS



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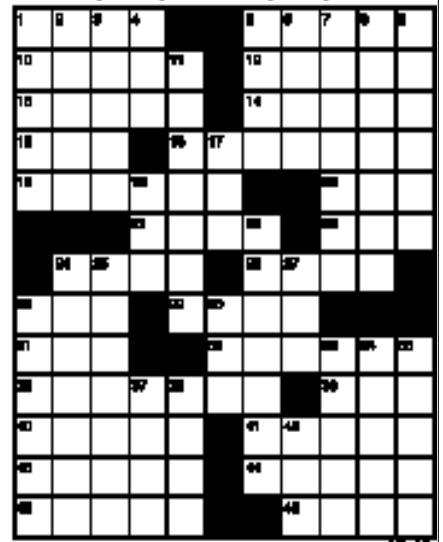
- ACROSS**
- Region
 - Tied a shoe
 - Cheese chunk
 - Animated
 - Friendship
 - Central theme
 - Collection
 - Hit song of 1953
 - Breathe out
 - Buddham branch
 - Raw info
 - Finish
 - Marine fishes
 - Spring period
 - Skil
 - Mound
 - "The Boy King"
 - Threw into the air
 - Legendary warrior
 - Chopping tool
 - Foe of Bugs
 - La Scala setting
 - Loose talk
 - Build
 - Aunt, to Antoine
- DOWN**
- Conscious
 - Dance record
 - Head of costumes
 - Rep.
 - Flock member
 - Scads
 - Volar, e.g.
 - Plain to see
 - Represent in court
 - Cillum
 - Wager
 - Tack on
 - Stave
 - Martin movie
 - "101 Dalmatians" villain
 - Football
 - Pole worker
 - Optimally
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 - Yams
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 - Departed
 - Good on
 - Tax grp.

LOCALS	BEST
INABIT	ARIA
DENALI	LINT
	GIROLE
DESK	FACED
EAU	PREDATE
USE	OAT NUT
CEZANNE	ADD
ELCID	FLEX
	ARSENE
FEND	DOREMI
LEAR	AVALON
UGLY	MALDEN

Yesterday's answer

- 22 Stave
- 30 Under the weather
- 33 Yams
- 34 Pradise
- 35 Fender
- 36 ecare
- 37 Departed
- 38 Good on
- 42 Tax grp.

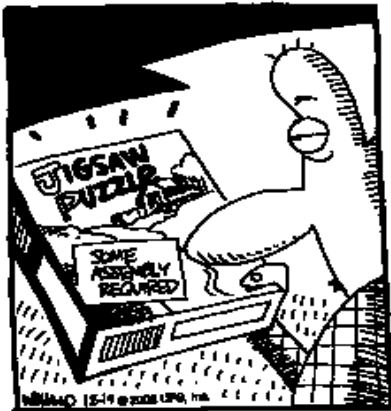
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NEWS OF THE WEIRD by Chuck Shepard

Man blames hospital for committing murder

In October, Kevin William Presland, 44, commenced his lawsuit against the James Fletcher Hospital in Newcastle, Australia, in which he is asking to be financially compensated because, he said, hospital personnel released him prematurely after a brief psychiatric admission in 1995 and thus made it easy for him to kill his prospective sister-in-law a few hours later. Presland's lawyer acknowledges that nothing can be done to help the woman's family but says Presland, at least, deserves a payoff. The hospital says Presland was calm and rational and that it had no legal basis for detaining him.

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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2002

TODAY'S EVENTS

Ongoing support groups for people 55 and older. Current openings in Men's Group. Thursdays, 11:15 to 12:45. Center for Healthy Aging, 2125 Arizona Avenue. Sliding scale fee. Not drop-in groups. Phone interview required. Call Information and Referral. (310)576-2550.

Senior Suppers - Discounted meals for people AGE 55 or older are served daily, from 3:30 p.m. To 7 p.m., in the cafeteria at Santa Monica-UCLA Medical Center, 1250 16th Street in Santa Monica. \$3.69 Info only: (310)319-4837.

Dharma at the Clubhouse. A weekly book and multimedia study group, no fee. Applying studies of Buddhism-Dharma into our daily lives. Every Thursday night at the Clubhouse at Douglas Park, 25th & Wilshire. 7:30 to 9pm. Dan (310) 451-4368 www.santamonicaaksg.org

O'Briens Irish Pub, 2941 Main St., Santa Monica, pours A Pint of Funny, every Thurs., 8 p.m. FREE! (310)396-4725.

Gotham Comedy Night! Standup at Gotham Hall, 1431 3rd St. Promenade, Santa Monica; every Thursday, 7:30 pm, \$5.00 + 2 item min. 21/ over. (323) 525-5254

Unurban Coffee House presents Comedy Crunch every Thursday evening. Showtime is 7pm. 3301 Pico Blvd. (310)315-0056

Gotham Hall presents Comedy Night! Featuring professional stand-ups. Every Thursday, 1431 3rd St. Promenade, 8pm. Admission is \$5 + 2 item minimum. 21 and over. (323)525-5254

FRIDAY

The annual Santa Monica Nativity Scenes is on display at Palisades Park along Ocean Avenue near Arizona. The 14 lighted scenes with life-size figures depicting events surrounding Christ's birth will remain on display through January 1. For more information please call (310) 453-4445.

Santa Monica High School Theater Arts Department presents Romeo & Juliet. Friday and Saturday nights at 8:00pm. November 22nd through December 21st. \$10.00 for students, children, and seniors, \$15.00 for adults. Humanities Center Theater at Santa Monica High School, 601 Pico Blvd. For more information please call (310)458-5939.

MAGICOPOLIS presents HOCUS POCUS! (Fish Bones Choke Us). The stage explodes with a colorful mix of Magic, Special Effects, Sleight of Hand, Comedy and Music that's sure to delight audiences of all ages. At MAGICOPOLIS, 1418 Fourth Street, Santa Monica. Fridays & Saturdays at 8pm, \$20. Saturday & Sundays at 2pm, \$15. For tickets call 310-451-2241.

Santa Monica Strutters, a FREE program sponsored by UCLA Healthcare's 50-Plus Program! Walking programs for adults 50 or older looking for safe, low-impact exercise in a comfortable environment. The Santa Monica Strutters meet Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, from 8 a.m. To 10 a.m., at Santa Monica Place, Fourth St. and Broadway Ave. in Santa Monica.

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MOVIE °GUIDE

LOEWS CINIPLEX BROADWAY CINEMA

1441 Third St. at Broadway
 Empire (2002) (R) 12:00, 2:30, 5:00, 7:30, 10:00.
 Solaris (2002) (PG-13) 11:30, 2:00, 4:30, 7:00, 9:30. About Schmidt (R) 12:15, 1:15, 3:15, 4:15, 6:15, 7:15, 9:15, 10:15

MANN CRITERION

1313 Third St.
 The Ring (PG-13) 12:45, 10:00. Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (PG) 12:00, 3:30, 7:00, 10:30. Adaptation (R) 11:00, 2:00, 4:00, 5:00, 7:15, 8:00, 10:20, 11:00. Adam Sandler's Eight Crazy Nights (PG-13) 2:30. Treasure Planet (PG) 11:30, 2:15, 4:45, 7:30. The Hot Chick (PG-13) 11:15, 1:50, 4:30, 7:05, 9:45. 8 Mile (R) 11:45.

AMC THEATRE SM 7

1310 3rd Street
 Analyze That (R) 11:35, 1:50, 4:30, 7:30, 9:55.
 Die Another Day (PG-13) 12:45, 4:00, 7:15, 10:20. Drumline (PG-13) 11:25, 2:10, 5:00, 7:55, 10:45. Maid in Manhattan (PG-13) 11:45, 2:30, 5:15, 8:00, 10:35. Star Trek: Nemesis: with Csptions (PG-13) 11:15, 2:00, 4:50, 7:40, 10:30p
 The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers (PG-13) 10:20, 11:00, 2:15, 3:00, 6:15, 7:00, 10:15, 11:00.

LANDMARK NU-WILSHIRE

1314 Wilshire Blvd.
 Bowling for Columbine (R) 1:30, 4:15, 7:30, 10:15. Far From Heaven (PG-13) 2:00, 4:30, 10:00.

LAEMMLE MONICA

1332 2nd St.
 Rabbit-Proof Fence (PG) 12:15, 2:40, 5:05, 7:30, 9:55. Frida (R) 1:45, 4:30, 7:15, 10:05. Evelyn (PG) 1:00, 3:20, 5:40, 8:00, 10:15.

AERO THEATRE

1328 Montana Ave.
 Bloody Sunday 5:00 Secretary 7:30, 10:00



BACK PAGE



A 'Lucky' getaway

By The Associated Press

WHITING, Iowa — A dog named Lucky lived up to its name when it alerted a family to a house fire.

"The dog bit my toe," said Anna Malone, one of the children. "I then woke up and saw a lot of smoke."

Anna, her two siblings and her mother had taken Lucky in when the dog was a stray. They escaped the fire last week at their home in Whiting, about 30 miles south of Sioux City.

Whiting Fire Chief Skip West said an electrical problem in the basement likely started the fire.

Trashed art worth up to \$12K

By The Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — A middle school teacher proved that one man's trash is another man's treasure when he stumbled across a valuable watercolor discarded on a trash heap.

Henry Drakeford, who teaches art at Spirit Creek Middle School, found the painting last summer while visiting his brother in Washington, D.C.

"We were just riding around an area of the city where they were renovating houses, and I saw it lying on a trash heap," Drakeford said.

The painting turned out to be "Autumn Landscape," a watercolor from 1899 by Jasper Francis Cropsey.

Auction house officials estimated the painting to be worth between \$8,000 and \$12,000, and he spent \$600 to have the painting restored.

Cropsey lived from 1823 to 1900 and was a member of the famed Hudson River School. He was best known for his bright, bold autumn landscapes.

But Drakeford's find was not sold when it went up for sale Saturday at Weschler's auction house in Washington, said spokeswoman Mary Dillon.

"There was a fair amount of damage to the piece," something that "scared away potential collectors," Dillon said.

"Some things do better in the trash than others," Dillon added, noting that her auction house once sold a bronze statue slated for scrap metal for \$16,000. "Paper is the most delicate medium."

Drakeford, who is also a painter, has found several discarded pieces of art this way. Whenever he gets the chance, he searches abandoned houses and trash piles.

"People just don't know what they've got," he told The Augusta Chronicle. "I knew I had an original. I just didn't know how much it was worth."

The oldest graduate

By The Associated Press

SARASOTA, Fla. — Bernice Strickland started college in 1945. She finished Tuesday.

Strickland, 76, was the oldest of 202 graduates receiving bachelor's or master's degrees from the University of South Florida at commencement exercises Tuesday night. Strickland majored in English and American Literature.

"I taught her five times, and she never missed a class," said literature professor Susan Harrington. "That was remarkable."

Strickland, a retired kindergarten teacher, left the Florida State College for Women — now known as Florida State University — in 1947, and didn't resume

taking classes until 1995, when she enrolled at Indian River Community College in Stuart.

She had no computer skills and had never read a William Shakespeare play. Now she's a literature graduate, one who got mostly A's at USF.

Strickland said she always had wanted to complete her degree and decided to make those plans a reality after her husband, Lantis, died.

"When he passed away, I wanted something to do to pass the time," she said. "I decided then it was time to go back."

The golden toolbox

By The Associated Press

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. — Jim Fouchey says he didn't think about a windfall when he found a toolbox loaded with thousands of dollars in cash in the road.

He worried about the person who lost the box.

"That's the first thing I thought, you know, it was an employee and he's going to lose his job and it's darn near Christmas," Fouchey said.

Fouchey, a retired hospital employee who runs a home repair and improvement business, decided to turn the box over to state police, who discovered \$4,483 inside, as well as identification that connected it to Gilbert's Service Oil Co. of Traverse City.

Fouchey, of Interlochen, said he found the box near U.S. 31 in the center lane last Tuesday.

He threw it in the back of his truck and forgot about it while he did some shopping.

When he returned to his truck, he remembered the toolbox and looked inside to discover envelopes filled with cash, the Traverse City Record-Eagle reported.

"I went, 'Holy mackerel.' It was quite a surprise," he said.

Fouchey said the employee who lost the money called him and thanked him.

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