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Area north of Montana may be history

Residents protecting property values; fearful of government intrusion on private homes

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON
Daily Press Staff Writer

"Big Brother" may be moving into the north of Montana Avenue neighborhood.

Residents who live north of Montana are up in arms over a study that could result in their neighborhood becoming an historic district.

The city of Santa Monica has hired an historic preservation company to study whether or not the neighborhood north of Montana should be designated historic. But the study has neighbors fearing excessive government rule more than a history lesson.

The Santa Monica Landmarks Commission heard from dozens of angry and concerned homeowners last week after it emerged that the commission may consider converting the neighborhood.

"For some people it's a frightening proposition that there is government intrusion on what you can do with your property," said Tom Larmore, a north of Montana homeowner. "If you are in an historic district you've got a problem because you cannot alter your house."

Larmore, also a member of the newly created Santa Monicans for Responsive Government, distributed 1,000 flyers to residents in the area the weekend before the Dec. 17 landmark commission meeting to inform

See MONTANA, page 3

Santa Claus sting nabs motorists

By the Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Naughty drivers didn't brake for Santa.

Twenty-eight motorists zipping down Woodman Avenue at Parthenia Street in Panorama City got caught in a holiday season sting targeting drivers who ignore pedestrians in cross walks.

Officer Kurt Garcia dressed as Old St. Nick for Wednesday's four-hour "Santa Claus" sting.

"He would stand there and get ready to cross the street and three or four cars at a time would blow him out of the crosswalk. Santa was dodging," traffic Sgt. Dale Turner said.

In all, 38 pedestrians in the San Fernando Valley have been killed this year, compared with 20 just three years ago.



Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press

A surfer spends his Thursday afternoon riding the waves near the north Sunset break. Many water lovers will take to the shores for at least a few days after the rain falls to avoid pollution from storm water runoff. The state water quality board recently voted to make cities more accountable in their management of what goes into the ocean.

Santa Monica supports costly storm water plan

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON
Daily Press Staff Writer

Santa Monica is pushing for stricter storm runoff rules even though many nearby cities oppose them.

Regional water quality officials last week approved the restrictive rules even though dozens of cities within Los Angeles County are fighting the plan, which is intended to better regulate how storm water is collected and where it goes. Officials from the opposing cities say the plans are too costly. The entire plan is expected to cost all 90 cities involved about $50 billion.

But Santa Monica is ready to pay whatever it takes to keep its coastline as clean as it can, said Craig Perkins, the city's director of the environmental and public works department. He added that a regional approach and a more aggressive plan to combat water pollution has support here.

Storm water management, like garbage collection and street sweeping, is part of the taxpayers' responsibility.

"One of the problems that other cities confront is that the storm water costs are taken out of the general fund and is an operational expense," Perkins said. "Santa Monica has a self supporting fund for storm water management."

About six years ago Santa Monica placed a general fee on property owners — around $26 for single-family home — to pay for storm water management. It generates about $1.25 million annually, but the city of Santa Monica spends much more than that each year through other funding sources like developer fees and government grants.

"Trying to protect Santa Monica Bay from periodic storm water surges is best done at the source, where rainwater runoff first enters the system," said Santa Monica City Councilman Kevin McKeown, adding the

See PLAN, page 3

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HOROSCOPE

Relax and go with the flow, Aries

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)
★★★★ Recognize the importance of maintaining your word, even it means a bit of a problem or discomfort. Take a stand, especially with a work-related matter. Those in your immediate circle will listen. You don't recognize just how vibrant you are. Tonight: Relax and go with the flow.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
★★★★★ Follow your friends, and you can't go wrong. A partner reverses his or her stand, and goes his or her own way. Friends share high enthusiasm and fun, though you do need to brainstorm with one specific person. Follow the music. Join in the caroling with others. Tonight: Start the partying.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20)
★★★ You carry the banner at work or at home, wherever you feel it's necessary. You don't need to extend yourself too far. Stay secure when dealing with someone on a one-on-one level in the next few weeks. Ferret out someone's feelings, rather than guessing or making up a story. Tonight: Where the action is.

CANCER (June 21-July 22)
★★★★★ Reach out for someone. Pressure builds around relationships in the next few weeks. If you think back, this tension occurs every year. Part of the reason might be the pressure of the holidays. Let others express more of their feelings, even if you wished they would convey their emotions differently. Tonight: Drive around and enjoy the lights.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)
★★★★ A partner or associate could be more cantankerous than you realize. Plans rapidly change as a result. You might not want to be as close to this person if he or she is always this moody. Focus on nurturing yourself as well. Read between the lines with someone. Tonight: Make nice.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)
★★★★ You don't have to do much. All you have to do is respond. An invitation could delay returning home early. Let someone know rather than wonder. Power your high energy with good organization when trying to complete last-minute details. Tonight: Let the romantic in you emerge.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)
★★★★ Communicate with others about your expectations, especially at home and with family. If people don't know your expectations, how can they possibly fill them? Take greater responsibility for your communication. Meanwhile, get busy with errands. Tonight: Soak your feet in a hot bath.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)
★★★★★ Your imagination lets you reach out for others but also could do considerable damage to your checkbook. You just might pull a rabbit out of a black hat, if you use your good sense and your ingenuity. Initiate conversations with brainstorming buddies. Tonight: Cheer the holiday and long weekend in.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)
★★★ Family and/or a domestic matter could prove to be an albatross in the making if you don't handle this situation effectively and immediately. Brainstorm with family, talking about limits and frustrations. Use your financial wisdom and stay clear of trouble. Tonight: Nap first.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)
★★★★ Reach out for others, especially those who might not be as cheerful or upbeat as you. Be appreciative of the different people in your life and what they offer. Be explicit if you run into a problem. How you communicate has much to do with your reception. Tonight: Out making merry!

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)
★★★★ Finish off errands and clear out your Santa list. Balance your budget carefully before you take off to do your thing or to finish off a "few" last-minute gifts. You might want to think about what might be most meaningful to someone. Take your time. Tonight: Treat yourself too!

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)
★★★★ How someone views a problem could be a lot different through your eyes. Your tendency, especially now, is to take action and clear out any hassle. Add that extra touch and smile that cheers up everyone around you. Avoid making a big deal out of anything. Tonight: Just ask. It's someone's pleasure.

WEATHER

Today ... Partly cloudy with a high 56°F. Winds from the West Southwest at 9mph.

Tonight ... Partly cloudy with a low of 42°F. Winds from the West North at 3mph.

Tomorrow ... Partly cloudy High—60°F Low—41°F

QUOTE of the DAY

"Dying is one of the few things done as easily lying down."

— Woody Allen

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STATE



Associated Press

Producer Dick Clark, left, introduces the nominations for the 2002 Golden Globe Awards Thursday in Beverly Hills. Hollywood Foreign Press Association President Dagmar Dunlevy, second from left, actors Lucy Liu, Rebecca Romijn-Stamos, and Hugh Jackman participated in the televised event.

Golden Globe nominees are dominated by somber theme

BY DAVID GERMAIN
AP Movie Writer

BEVERLY HILLS — It's definitely a year for the terrifying, troubled, twisted and tragic at the movies. Solemn films about delusion, blackmail, vengeance and doomed love dominated Golden Globe contenders, including "A Beautiful Mind" and "Moulin Rouge," which led with six nominations each.

"A Beautiful Mind" — starring Russell Crowe as schizophrenic math genius John Nash, tormented by hallucinations — was nominated for best dramatic picture Thursday. Its other nominations included Crowe for dramatic actor, Jennifer Connelly for supporting actress and Ron Howard for director.

Competing in the musical or comedy category, "Moulin Rouge's" nominations included best picture, actress Nicole Kidman, actor Ewan McGregor and director Baz Luhrmann. The tragicomic musical presents Kidman and McGregor as ill-fated lovers at a Paris nightclub in 1899.

Kidman also was nominated for dramatic actress in the horror story "The Others."

Also cited for two films was Billy Bob Thornton: dramatic actor for his blackmailing barber in the Coen brothers' "The Man Who Wasn't There"; and musical or comedy actor for "Bandits," in which he plays a neurotic bank robber whose quirks include Thornton's real-life fear of antique furniture.

"This is just a theory, but maybe the good stuff is sometimes the edgier stuff, because the people making it aren't as worried about pleasing everybody, so artistic values don't suffer as much," said Thornton, who also stars in the sobering death-row drama "Monster's Ball," which earned a dramatic-actress nomination for Halle Berry.

The Golden Globes, awarded by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, often are a launchpad for a film's Academy Award prospects. But no clear favorites are taking shape from the Globe nominations and earlier movie honors, which have been spread among a wide range of films.

Sissy Spacek, a five-time Academy Award nominee who won for 1980's "Coal Miner's Daughter," could become the front-runner for another Oscar. Spacek, who plays a vengeful mother in "In the Bedroom," has been a top pick in early film honors.

The Golden Globe awards will air live Jan. 20 on NBC.

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Cities will appeal stronger storm water enforcement

PLAN, from page 1

council officially supported the regional water quality board's plan earlier this year. "Santa Monica has pioneered efficient on-site catch basins that hold rain temporarily and convert it back to groundwater instead of sending it into the storm drains. This converts our overpaved Los Angeles basin from a floodmaker back into a true watershed."

The rules, unanimously approved by the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board, are in the form of a five-year permit to Los Angeles County and all of the cities within it, except Long Beach.

The permits track illegal discharges into storm drains, inspect businesses and install tougher storm water rules. Water quality control board members say the permit is necessary to toughen rules that have been ineffective because of lax enforcement. More than 35 of the nearly 90 cities in Los Angeles County oppose the rules, saying they involve too much regulatory burden.

"Everybody uses the beach ... that's where L.A. goes to escape the pressures of the region," said Mark Gold, executive director of Heal the Bay, an environmental group.

The move will require cities to inspect many industrial and commercial facilities for storm water violations, develop cleanup plans and catch hookups which drain illegally into storm water systems.

"No doubt, urban runoff is the greatest threat to Southern California waters," said Board Chairman David Nahai. "This is a decisive step in the right direction for dealing with the problem."

Environmentalists said the measures are needed to clean up Southern California beaches and streams and protect wildlife, tourism and residents' enjoyment of the coast.

"All of the cities are going to have to raise their standards," Perkins said.

However, the opposing cities will appeal the new rules to the State Water Quality Control Board.

"The cities support the permit, but they don't have $50 billion," said Rufus C. Young, Jr., an attorney representing 10 of the cities.

Wendy Phillips, acting assistant executive officer of the board, said the cities were overstating the cost. Board staff said the changes would typically add 1-2 percent to the cost of construction.

Editor's note: The Associated Press contributed to this report.

"For some people it's a frightening proposition that there is government intrusion on what you can do with your property."

— TOM LARMORE
Homeowner



Del Pastrana/Daily Press
Lara Stephenson shows good sportsmansip as she contributes to a street performance with her family on the Promenade one recent afternoon.

North of Montana could become historic district

MONTANA, from page 1

them that their neighborhood is being considered for historic designation.

"It was designed to get people's attention," Larmore said. "If nobody paid attention to this, nothing would happen."

But Liz Bar-El, a city planner and the liaison to the landmarks commission, said the flyer contained misinformation and was used to infuse fear into neighbors. As a result, many people became emotional and their fears were premature, she added.

"Because of the misinformation out there, people came up in arms," Bar-El aid. "Districts are not generally designated if there is no support for them. If there is no interest in maintaining that neighborhood, then it won't be."

Larmore said people were criticized for being emotional, but the fact is they don't want the government meddling in their affairs. They fear restrictions would result in a reduction of property values.

Bar-El said the city last conducted an historic resources inventory in 1986. Now it wants to update the list of historic structures within city limits. Part of that study may suggest districts could be created to preserve Santa Monica's history and character. The first neighborhood on the list is north of Montana. She added that Historic Resources Group, the West Los Angeles-based consultant, is expected to present its report in February. After that, there will be many community meetings to gauge the public's support.

"That gives me absolutely no comfort whatsoever," said Larmore. "It doesn't take too much creativity to think that area will become a district."

The fundamental question is whether government should be in the business of telling property owners how to maintain their homes, said Jacquie Banks, a realtor at Caldwell Banker, a majority of whose business is north of Montana.

"If everyone embraced it, it would be positive because it's a sought-after neighborhood. I would think it would be the transitional period that would be negative."

— JACQUIE BANKS
Caldwell Banker Realtor

She suggested historic designation could make a neighborhood more desirable. Banks noted a neighborhood in her hometown of San Antonio became a treasured landmark that characterizes the history of the area after it received historic designation. People there are proud to be property owners in the district, she said.

But rather than dictating to property owners, Banks thinks the city should "incentivize" people to preserve the historic character of their neighborhoods, perhaps through tax breaks.

"As an American, I don't want the government telling me what I can or cannot do with my property," she said. "I would like the homeowners to have a choice ... What I would say to the homeowners is 'embrace it,' but to the government I would say, 'don't make them embrace it.'"

The idea that historic landmark restrictions devalue the properties is a very real threat to homeowners in the area, Banks agreed. But she added that it's a "push-pull" situation, because homeowners could find value in being a special part of the town's history.

"If everyone embraced it, it would be positive because it's a sought-after neighborhood," she said, adding it may be a few years before people see value in buying or owning in a historic district. "I would think it would be the transitional period that would be negative."

There are 256 homes in the neighborhood north of Montana. City officials fear that over time, developers will buy up all the land, demolish the old houses and build bigger ones. Further, some popular U.S. neighborhoods have become virtual ghost towns as mansions become second homes and "go dark."

"They are not looking at it as a neighborhood, but as a piece of land," Bar-El said. "They come, build and then they leave and then we will say at some point, 'how did this happen?'"

Banks points out that many of the homes there may not fall into the category of being historic anymore.

"It's a wonderful idea at first glance," she said. "But I think the neighborhood is too far gone, meaning the homes are already changed."

Bar-El said there are two historic districts in Santa Monica right now — the Third Street neighborhood, which extends from Beach Street to Hill Street and the Bay Street cluster, which is four properties on Bay Street. The next in line to be studied for historic designation could be Ocean Park, although that has not yet been determined, she said.



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Compensation for terrorist attack victims announced

BY KEN GUGGENHEIM
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Families of victims of the terrorist attacks would receive an average of $1.65 million under a federal aid program unveiled Thursday. The Justice Department will begin taking claims Friday and the first partial checks could be issued before New Year's.

At a news conference, Kenneth Feinberg, the lawyer in charge of the fund, said it was "an unprecedented display of taxpayers' generosity."

But he told The Associated Press later that he doubted it would satisfy victims' families.

"They are just so caught up in the horror of what they've gone through that I think they have different expectations," said Feinberg, who said he has met with hundreds of victims' relatives.

Joseph Maurer, whose 31-year-old daughter, Jill Campbell, was killed at the World Trade Center, said he is more concerned about a fitting memorial and the search for bodies than about money.

But he also thought of her 1-year-old daughter. "I would like to see that she has no problems in her life and will be able to go to school," said Maurer, a retired firefighter from Brooklyn, N.Y., who also lost a dozen firefighter friends.

The compensation relatives receive would depend largely on the victim's family size, age and earnings. The survivors of a low-income 60-year bachelor may receive $300,000 while those of a wealthy, 35-year-old executive with two children could receive $3.8 million.

Life insurance and pension fund payments would be subtracted from the awards, but not charitable contributions.

Nikki Stern, whose husband, James E. Potorti, was killed at the World Trade Center, said government's figures are misleading because of those deductions.

"I am very concerned that the number that has been released has been misrepresented," she said.

Mark Morabito of Auburn, N.Y., whose wife, Laura Lee, was killed in the plane that crashed into the World Trade Center's north tower, said life insurance shouldn't be a factor.

"Why should people be penalized for planning for their future?" he said.

Relatives who take the money would also largely give up their right to sue. Some may decline the federal money to pursue cases in court.

A woman whose husband died aboard one of the jetliners that slammed into the World Trade Center filed the first lawsuit against an airline over the Sept. 11 attacks Thursday, contending negligence on the part of United led to the hijacking.

Those seriously injured are also eligible for compensation based on the severity of their injuries.

Congress on Thursday also moved to waive income taxes and provide payroll tax relief to the families of victims of the attacks. Sen. Jon Corzine, D-N.J., said the tax relief would provide a bridge for families between the receiving of charitable donations and waiting for help from the federal aid program.

The fund was set up in September as part of the $15 billion airline bailout bill. Feinberg said he expects victims will receive a total of $6 billion with $4.8 billion coming from the federal government and $1.2 billion from other sources, such as insurance.

More than 3,000 people were killed in the attacks at the World Trade Center, Pentagon and the plane crash in Pennsylvania.

Feinberg said the payment plan was developed after meetings with victims' families, lawyers and charitable groups. His biggest concerns were to make it fair, get awards to families quickly and avoid enormous differences between the wealthiest and poorest recipients.

Those filing claims can receive advance payments of $50,000, or $25,000 for injured victims. Feinberg said that in cases where there is no doubt about who is entitled to the payments, the first checks could be issued within days after an application is submitted.

"We do not want to drag our feet with red tape and bureaucracy," Feinberg said.

He said he hopes every claim can be paid in full within months. But payments cannot be made until it is determined who is entitled to the money — something that will depend on the laws of the states where the victims lived. Those laws will also determine whether same-sex partners are eligible for compensation.

While the size of payments depends largely on the victims' salary and earnings potential, the fund doesn't plan excessive payments for the families of victims who were in the top 2 percent of all wage earners. That means the family of someone who had a $1 million a year salary wouldn't get more than the family of someone earning $240,000.

Feinberg said charitable payments weren't included in the payment formula after some charities threatened to delay their payments to victims' families if it were a consideration.

Feinberg said that in determining victim payments, he will not try to distinguish between different levels of grief among the survivors.

Official count of victims from Sept. 11 attacks

By the Associated Press

NEW YORK: 2,963
World Trade Center: City officials say 454 are missing. The medical examiner's office has issued 555 death certificates. An additional 1,954 death certificates have been issued without a body, at the request of victims' families.
Includes passengers and crew on hijacked planes:
American Airlines Flight 11: 92
United Airlines Flight 175: 65

WASHINGTON: 189
Pentagon: 125
American Flight 77: 64 passengers and crew

PENNSYLVANIA: 44
United Flight 93: 44 passengers and crew
TOTAL: 3,196
As of Thursday, an Associated Press list of Sept. 11 victims included 3,011 names.
That list is based on information collected from the Defense Department, medical examiners, the courts, AP foreign bureaus, companies, families, member newspapers, funeral homes and places of worship.

Ebola outbreak despite border control increase

BY LOUIS OKAMBA
Associated Press Writer

BRAZZAVILLE, Republic of Congo — Despite stepped-up border controls, an outbreak of the deadly disease Ebola has spread from Gabon to neighboring Republic of Congo, the World Health Organization and government officials said Thursday.

The country's health officials have identified 11 cases in a remote, forested region on the northeastern border with Gabon, where 16 cases have already been reported, WHO said in a statement released in Geneva. The health ministry confirmed the outbreak but said the number of people infected was less than 10.

At least 15 of the victims have died, authorities have said. It was not clear how many of the deaths were in Republic of Congo.

Authorities on both sides of the border had feared the disease would spread and restricted movement between the two central African nations.

But at least one woman believed to be infected with Ebola fled Gabon and was located on the other side of the border in Mbomo village, Republic of Congo health authorities said. The woman's baby died in Republic of Congo before she was repatriated to Gabon, where she also died, health ministry spokesman Bertin Ebinda said.

An international team of medical experts from WHO was working with health officials in both countries to help contain the virus.

Medical staff are tracing everyone who has had contact with any of the known victims and observing them for signs of the virus. A total of 133 contacts are being followed up in Gabon and 94 in Republic of Congo, WHO said.

Local authorities have cordoned off a 125-mile region in Republic of Congo, restricting movement to and from the area. Access is also being restricted to four border villages in Gabon.

The first death was recorded Dec. 2. in Ekata, a Gabon village about five miles from the Republic of Congo border.

At least 10 of the dead were members of a single extended family — a typical pattern for Ebola, which spreads quickly to people coming in contact with the patients or their bodies. A nurse who apparently treated one of the victims also died.

Ebola is one of the most deadly viral diseases known to humankind, causing death in 50 to 90 percent of those who become infected.

The virus is passed through contact with bodily fluids, such as mucus, saliva and blood, but is not airborne. It 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 the disease usually kills its victims faster than it can spread, burning out before it can reach too far.



Associated Press

U.S. sailors walk through the super-heated jet wash of an F/18C Hornet as it launches on a mission Thursday aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt in the Arabian Sea. Warplanes from the ship continue their missions in support of the military campaign in Afghanistan.

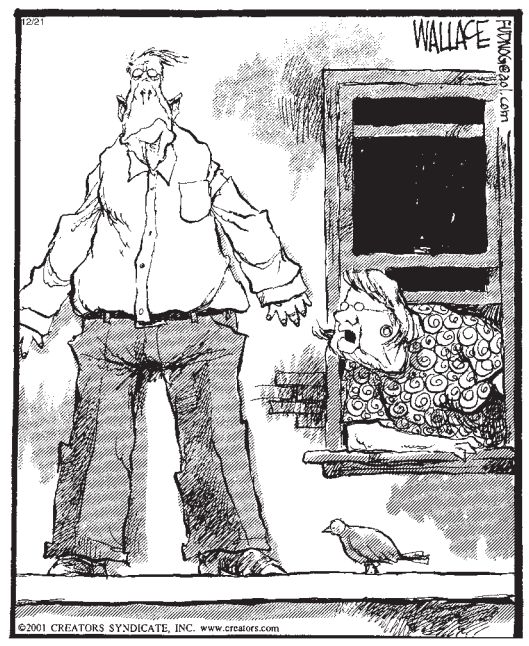
COMICS

The Dinette Set by Julie Larson



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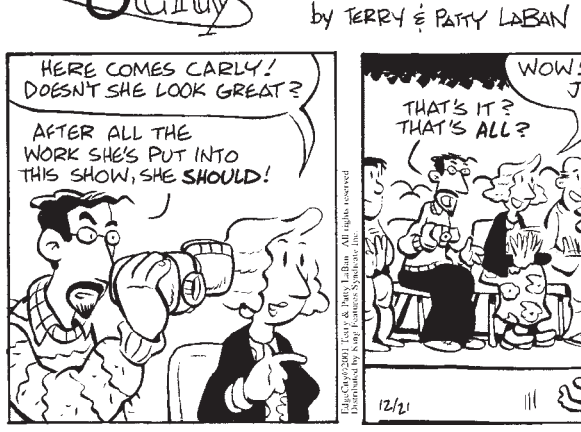
By Russ Wallace



"If you're still here when I get back, I'll make dinner."

edge City

by TERRY & PATTY LABAN



Reality Check®

By Dave Whammond



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By Dave Coverly



CROSSWORD

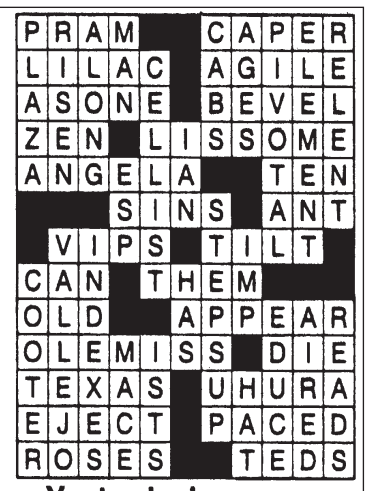
By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 "Fight Club" star
5 Playground users
9 Friend of Aramis
11 Lucy's pal
13 Opening music
14 Reunion attendee
15 Movie computer
16 Hand communication
18 Blusher's hue
20 Crumb carrier
21 Pale
22 Concerning
23 Poet Hughes
24 Project
25 "M*A*S*H" star
27 Yard surrounder
29 Course area
30 Fiction genre
32 Baryshnikov, for one
34 Depot: Abbr.
35 Use
36 Diner
38 Paris divider
39 Ticked off
40 Winter transport
41 Reps.' foes

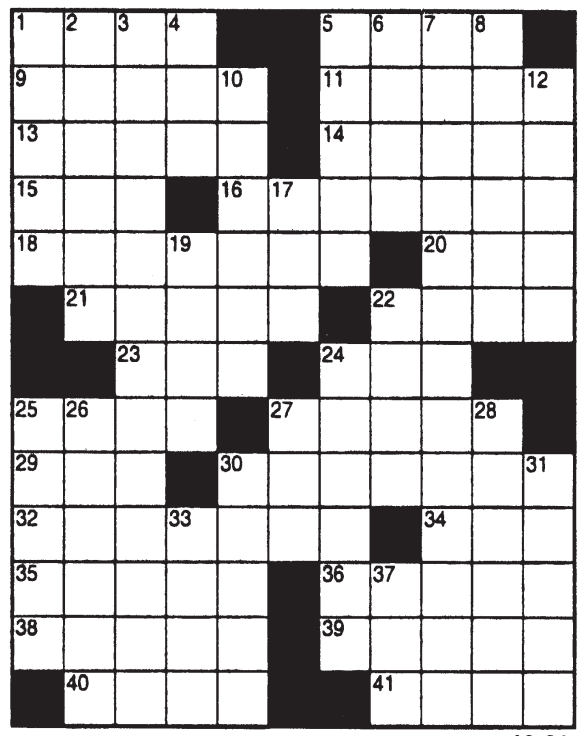
DOWN

1 Ways to go
2 Cornell setting
3 Nicholson film
4 Male turkey
5 Belief
6 Elevator man
7 Redford film
8 Trig function
10 Closed up
12 Slowly, in a score
17 Stag party guests
19 Carla's portrayer
22 Reunion attendee
24 Athlete Bruce
25 Mythical strongman
26 Foliage
27 Flying overseer
28 Regard
30 Sent in a 1040
31 Gridiron amounts
33 Wall climber
37 Succor



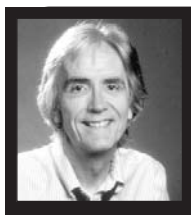
Yesterday's answer

PRAM CAPER
LILAC AGILE
ASONE BEVEL
ZEN LISSOME
ANGELA TEN
SINS ANT
VIPS TILT
CAN THEM
OLD APPEAR
OLEMISS DIE
TEXAS UHURA
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12-21

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NEWS OF THE WEIRD

by Chuck Shepard

Toilet papering now a terrorist act

• According to the attorney for several Benicia (Calif.) High School students suspended for toilet-papering the school in November, principal Robert Palous, in carrying out the punishment, described the kids' actions as the school's own World Trade Center attack. And in an October Associated Press story about turning the Miami house in which Elian Gonzalez lived into a shrine, one visitor said, "To us, (the day that Elian was taken away) was almost equivalent to the Twin Towers day." And in November, outgoing Frederick, Md., Mayor Jim Grimes, who for months had been trying to prevent the local newspaper from getting an arrested prostitute's files publicly disclosed (allegedly to protect some friends), reacted to a judge's finally releasing them by saying: "I absolutely feel that the same thing that happened at the World Trade Center has hit me. I was terrorized (by The Frederick News-Post)."

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BACK PAGE

Dear Santa letters take a more serious tone this year

BY SEANNA ADCOX
Associated Press Writer

NORTH POLE, N.Y. — "Mommy lost her job after Sept. 11, 2001," 6-year-old Paris wrote to Santa Claus. "Daddy works two jobs now. Please help."

In another note, another tall order: "My daddy just died and I am so sad," wrote a girl named Lorie. "Could you please help us this year and make us happy again? I don't want any presents."

Organizations across the country that accept letters to Santa are seeing the effect of the Sept. 11 attacks on the Christmas wishes of America's children. Requests are pouring in for intangible gifts like safety, world peace and happiness, and some writers don't ask Santa to leave anything at all under the Christmas tree.

So says Ron Wood, a white-bearded Plattsburgh, N.Y., resident and the star attraction at the Santa's Workshop theme park in the town of North Pole in the Adirondack Mountains.

This Christmas, children's requests are taking "a more serious tone," said Wood, who has played Santa at schools and private parties for 41 years.

Andy Lambros of Santa Claus Online, a Southern California-based company that accepts e-mails to Santa, said about 70 percent of this year's letters feature selfless, intangible wishes.

"Less kids are thinking 'Me Me Me,' while the majority of children are thinking of the world as a whole," said Lambros, whose company receives thousands of Santa e-mail messages daily.

One girl, identified only as "Jenny," wrote: "I'm glad that I'm American and have a warm place to live. ... My wish this year is for all children to have peace and all the presents that they want."

"Less kids are thinking 'Me Me Me,' while the majority of children are thinking of the world as a whole."

— ANDY LAMBROS
Santa Claus Online

The letters reflect children's "overwhelming need" to feel safe and secure in an uncertain post-Sept. 11 world, said Albany-area social worker Vibetta Sanders.

"They are concerned for their entire family, especially if a child has a parent living in the city or working in possible target jobs, like with the state," she said.

Lorie, who was only identified by that name, was also among the children who sent e-mails to Santa Claus Online. Paris, who also didn't give a last name, wrote a letter to Santa's Workshop — one of more than 1,000 received.

Lynn Gaffney, a secretary at the theme park, said more of the letters than usual include a return address, perhaps because of awareness of anthrax scares.

Gaffney said fire trucks and rescue figures are popular items on kids' wish lists.

Lindsey Seymour doesn't want any gifts left under the tree. To her, Christmas normally means "love, joy and hope" — but this year, she writes, "it also means sadness."

"Sadness that some children don't have parents because of the World Trade Center (terrorist attacks)," explained her mother, Amy Seymour.

LeAdelle Phelps, a psychology professor at the University of Buffalo, believes children's' heightened concern for others and worry over their safety "is probably very short-lived," although that varies by kids' age and how people around them were affected by the attacks. She predicted that by next Christmas, Santa letters will be back to normal.

Sanders, the social worker, isn't so sure.

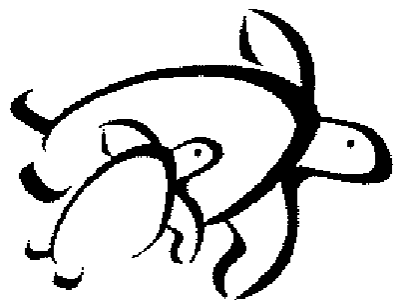
"Being in New York state takes on a different dynamic. Even in the upstate, the possibility of someone knowing someone (that's a victim), by however many degrees of separation, is pretty significant," she said.

YOUR OPINION MATTERS!

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