

Santa Monica Daily Press

A newspaper with issues



Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press

Mary Melgun volunteers at St. John's Hospital where she serves as an angel, helping patients through their E.R. experience.

Angels spread their wings during traumatic times

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON
Daily Press Staff Writer

Once resurrected at the emergency room at Saint John's, Mary Melgun has now become an angel there.

The 60 year old was spared her life there two years ago and still she returns every week to help others get through the traumatic experience of being an E.R. patient.

The Mar Vista resident suffered a ruptured cerebral aneurysm and was rushed to Saint John's E.R., where doctors quickly responded and transferred her to UCLA Medical Center. She underwent a 5-hour neuro-surgery operation.

"These people in the E.R., if they hadn't done everything right I would have never made it to UCLA," she said. "My loyalty remains at Saint John's."

Melgun is one of 30 volunteers who serve in the hospital's "Angel in the E.R." program. They provide patients with a hand to hold while they go through the stress of the emergency room.

After what hospital staff consider a phenomenal recovery, Melgun was asked to volunteer as an angel by Dr. Victor Candiotti, the E.R. doctor that helped save her life, as well as other staff members.

"They recognized I was good at communicating and that is a central element here," she said, adding that she first hes-

itated at the offer because emergency rooms aren't exactly her favorite place to hang out.

The energy of an emergency is not only depressing because most people there are acutely ill, but also the fast-paced environment can be extremely stressful for patients and staff.

"More than anyplace else, this program is needed in the E.R. They have been a huge help for the staff and I think the quality of what we do here has gone up a notch."

— DR. RUSS KINO
Saint John's Hospital

That's why Saint John's felt the need to float some angels in there to help ease patients' fears, answer their questions and give support to the medical staff.

"We do everything non-medical," Melgun said.

The list is long and varied in what the angels do in the E.R., but it includes

See ANGELS, page 5

Residents' group gives affordable housing project lukewarm OK

Ocean Park neighborhood group gives nod to project

BY ANDREW H. FIXMER
Daily Press Staff Writer

A controversial affordable housing proposal gained a narrow approval from a neighborhood group after concessions were made by project's developer.

Community Corp. of Santa Monica, the largest developer of affordable housing in the city, was given a narrow victory last week when the Design Standards Review Committee of the Ocean Park Community Organization voted 5-3 to endorse an \$11 million project at the corner of Pacific and Main streets.

The five building complex could potentially house about 185 people in 22 three-bedroom units, 16 two-bedroom units, and three units of four-bedrooms and one-bedrooms that would rent for \$500 to \$1,300 per month.

Next, the proposal will go before the entire OPCO board for approval at a meeting some time in January.

While DSRC approval is not a required step before getting city approval, it's part of the process the developer takes when getting public feedback on its Ocean Park projects, said CCSM executive director Joan Ling.

"It's really nice to have the DSRC vote for the project with some conditions because it reflects a neighborhood process at the end of which is general support for what we are intending to do," she said.

In exchange for its recommendation, DSRC members asked that the buildings

not cover more than 50 percent of the lot, set back the fourth floor by nine feet, add and maintain trees whenever possible, and keep the project to between 40 and 44 units.

They also want CCSM to consider restriping Bicknell, Pacific and Hollister streets, which some believed could be used as a traffic mitigation measure.

"Nothing is set in concrete until literally it's set in concrete and the building is completely built."

— JOAN LING
Community Corp. of Santa Monica

Community Corp. also agreed to deed-restrict the building so its residents cannot apply for street parking permits. While building proposal already contains more parking than required under city law, some residents are concerned the influx of new residents would make already limited street parking more scarce.

Even though a formal study is no longer required under city law, the board asked for a traffic study. However, the group agreed to have the study postponed until the data can be made available through the city, obviating an expensive and time-consuming report.

"We started this process 18 months ago," Ling said. "From what we have

See COMPLEX, page 5

Police arrest three for DUI

By Daily Press staff

Three people were arrested for driving under the influence and 21 others were issued traffic citations Saturday, when the Santa Monica Police Department conducted two saturation patrols.

Special traffic stops were set up on Lincoln Boulevard, just south of Pico Boulevard, and on Main Street, south of Pico Boulevard. During a six-hour period, officers stopped 59 vehicles, and issued 21 citations for various vehicle code violations and arrested three indi-

viduals for driving under the influence.

The traffic stop was part of a statewide DUI enforcement program called "Drink, Drive, You Lose," and it was sponsored by the State of California Office of Traffic Safety and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

"The goal of these programs aim at educating and bringing awareness to our community," said Lt. Frank Fabrega, an SMDP spokesman, "while at the same time detecting and removing drunk drivers from our roadways."

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★★★★★-Dynamic ★★★★★-Positive ★★★-Average
★★-So-so ★-Difficult

♈ ARIES (March 21-April 19)
★★★★★ Extremes punctuate last-minute happenings, as well as your whole day, for that matter. Others might really enjoy being with you. Be ready for the unexpected with a loved one. Someone close could be so generous that you are surprised by what comes up. Tonight: Just let it all happen.

♉ TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
★★★★★ Your extra efforts make a big difference in how you handle someone. Others could be a bit uptight, but your creative and dynamic approach loosens up the moment. Your caring seems to warm up a close, uptight associate. Tonight: Use your imagination.

♊ GEMINI (May 21-June 20)
★★★★★ Opt to stay close to home. Everything seems to fly in many different directions. You attempt to achieve key results involving an important person in your life. Recognize your limits within the immediate situation. Tonight: Share your feelings.

♋ CANCER (June 21-July 22)
★★★★★ Stay cheered up no matter what goes down or what others might think. Your ability to share feelings on a deeper level wins you quite a few friends. Touch base with the many you really care about. Tonight: Finish off last-minute errands.

♌ LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)
★★★★★ Hopefully you have saved some extra funds to handle last-minute expenses. Consider getting a couple of last-minute presents just in case you forget someone or something. Visit with a friend you really care about. Tonight: Treat someone to dinner.

♍ VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)
★★★★★ Your smile wins many favors. Right now, use that gift to help others relax and make last-minute decisions. You might be a bit overwhelmed by all that you hear. Be sensitive to someone who might not be quite as happy as you are. Tonight: Do more sharing.

♎ LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)
★★★ Take your time before you decide which path to follow. Step back and do some hard thinking. Perhaps you have pushed someone away without intending to. Tonight: Lay back for now.

♏ SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)
★★★★★ Join your friends. Make the most out of an opportunity that heads your way. You could be a bit tired or dragged down by recent holiday celebrations. Understand what is enough. Think through a decision. Tonight: Where the gang is.

♐ SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)
★★★★★ You really want to make an effort toward others. Touch base with a loved one who means a lot to you, who might not be part of your personal holiday celebration. Take time for those who are a part of your life, but not in your immediate circle. Tonight: A must appearance.

♑ CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)
★★★★★ Consider your options involving a loved one at distance. You manage to take care of and touch base with those who are close to you. A change in plans might prove delightful and quite rewarding. Don't get stuck. Tonight: Try something totally different.

♒ AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)
★★★★★ Others come forward, and you will choose whom you want to be with. You enjoy relating on a one-on-one level most. Opt for more togetherness. Work as a team with a key partner. You'll enjoy yourself to the max. Tonight: Say "yes" to an invitation.

♓ PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)
★★★★★ Respond to inquiries. What's going on behind all the questions is that others want to know that you're OK with the holiday season. Make an extra effort to respond to the many inquiries. Make decisions carefully in the next few days. Tonight: Where your friends are.

QUOTE of the DAY

"It's been a long time since I made love I can't remember who get tied up."

— Joan Rivers

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LOCAL □ STATE



Surfin' the swell



Franklin Smith/Special to the Daily Press
An experienced surfer catches waves on Saturday in Malibu. Recent rough weather has provided surfers with a great playground.

CALIFORNIA BRIEFS

Racial profiling records inundate LAPD

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Ethnic information forms designed to help federal officials determine whether Los Angeles Police Department officers engage in racial profiling are piling up.

A federal order requires the Police Department to record and publicly post the perceived ethnicity of all pedestrians and motorists stopped by officers since November 2001.

The one-page forms are one of many requirements contained in the LAPD consent decree, a package of federal reforms imposed in the wake of the Rampart corruption scandal. The LAPD is now deciding whether to discard a backlog of 185,000 forms that are at least seven months old.

Forms submitted by officers after July 1 have been properly scanned, but tackling the backlog will likely cost 43 cents a form, or \$86,000. Additionally, one in every 10 forms is filled out incorrectly.

"The answer may be that it's just not worth trying to go back and re-create historical data," Cmdr. Dan Koenig said.

The LAPD began requiring officers to fill out the forms in November 2001, instructing them to indicate whether they think each person stopped is white, black, Hispanic or a member of another ethnic group.

U.S. Data Source, the contractor hired to sort and compile data on the 18,000 forms a week, fell behind in its effort to copy the forms and sort the data, so the city hired a second contractor in August. But Tustin-based Scantron charged 43 cents per page compared to 9 cents per page levied by U.S. Data Source.

It caused the LAPD to miss its Aug. 1 deadline for posting six months worth of racial and ethnic data on its Web site, prompting a court-appointed independent monitor to conclude that the department is out of compliance on that element of the consent decree.

surf report

Information compiled by Jesse Haley

The steep northwester will miss all but the stand out LA County surf spots.

It will mix with remnant west-northwest swell for waist to chest high waves in north county. South Bay is expected to see slightly less size, most sets breaking at waist level.

Water pollution is still at high level due to continual rains, so consider that a risk.

LA County Public Health's official rain advisory is effective through Tuesday December 31st.

Today you'll see more of the new northwest swell, but with a small decrease in size thanks to further fading of the old west-northwester.

Most breaks remain in the two- to three-foot range at best.



Today's Tides:

High- 12:24 a.m. 3.51'
Low- 4:36 a.m. 2.66'
High- 10:39 a.m. 5.44'
Low- 6:23 p.m. -0.38'

Location	Tuesday	Wednesday	Water Quality
County	2-3'/Fair	2-3'/Fair	N/A
Zuma	2-3'/Fair	2-3'/Fair	N/A
Surfrider	1-2'/Fair	1-2'/Fair	N/A
Topanga	1-3'/Fair	1-3'/Fair	N/A
Venice	2-4'/Poor	2-4'/Poor	N/A
Porto	2-3'/Fair	2-3'/Fair	N/A

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know:

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OPINION

Living Wage movement reflected community values



Editor's note: The following is the debut of "Think Twice," a weekly column with opposing viewpoints on the same issue from two friends who don't always agree in their politics. Evelyn Jerome, a four-year resident of Santa Monica and Todd Flora, a five-year resident, carry on the same types of conversations many would hear at the local watering hole or coffee shop. Flora and Jerome, both Southern California natives and Democrats — one perhaps more conservative than the other — plan to present their opinions on both sides of issues in the city, the state and the nation.



Todd Flora

■ The Living Wage movement must continue in Santa Monica, and it must succeed.

A \$5 million gross receipt threshold was put in Measure JJ, as was a hardship exemption for businesses "on the bubble." Over 100 economists endorsed the living wage, as they know that in nearly 90 cities around the nation, living wages decreased poverty without damaging business.

And still the ideologues fought against a measure that would have resulted in greater

employee loyalty, and therefore less absenteeism, less attrition, and lower training costs.

They masked their more honest ideological arguments through deceptive mailers stating the living wage was a threat to everything from schools to libraries to women's reproductive choice. You must be kidding.

I'm pro profit — but I'm not pro windfall profit at the expense of investing in workers, the best "capital, plant, and equipment" investment a service industry business can make. I further reject old fashioned business ideology that says "the market this, and that market that," when it isn't the mar-

ket that may or may not be inviting a reform like the living wage, but merely conservative ideological blinders that are actively preventing it. Some wealthier employers — not all — simply cannot imagine a world where workers are paid enough to feed their families and get off of the public dole (saving our tax dollars). That's fine. But have the guts to admit it.

While focused on economic justice, the living wage issue here is also about the kind of city Santa Monica chooses to be. Ask yourself — if you only had two choices, would you want this City to: A) keep its commitment to largely progressive values,

with an agenda that for the last two decades had made Santa Monica an enviable tourist destination and first choice place to live and work? Or, B) would you want this city controlled by a vocal minority of conservative leaders who would run roughshod over renter protections, workers, coastal protection, and allow for "monster mansions" to replace the homes that created the Santa Monica aesthetic?

Some may think my question is loaded. But this is exactly the choice we face. The living wage is an extension of this larger question. I hope your choice is "A."



Evelyn Jerome

■ Local control. States' rights. Progressives fight against these principles that offer policy flexibility based on "community standards" because of the disparity that results.

"Local control" has allowed some states to implement a 24-hour waiting period before women can obtain an abortion, and has allowed some school districts to teach creationism as a factual alternative to evolution.

Progressives hate local control. But what

does this have to do with the living wage?

Why is differential policy wrong for some issues but not others?

All American citizens should have the same rights regardless of where they live. As for the issue of wages, I support a stepped-up increase in California's minimum wage.

But the recent Santa Monica living wage campaign was a deliberately dishonest one.

Why fabricate a "coastal zone" around four blocks, designing the ordinance to affect only a handful of businesses? Why not just come out and say this wage shall apply to these hotels? Are workers who work west of Fourth Street worth more than those who work in Santa Monica but

east of it?

Why hide behind the fact that the Santa Monica proposal was radically different from every other living wage ordinance ever passed? Eighty other cities in the country have a living wage, but those ordinances apply ONLY to businesses seeking contracts with municipal entities. Those municipalities have said, "if you provide a product or service, for which you will be compensated with taxpayer dollars, you must pay this particular wage." Apples and oranges.

Who decides how much profit is "too much" for private business? Government? The unions? Living wage activists talk about "windfall profits" and "social responsibility." We argue against govern-

ment legislating morality, then turn around and ask the voters to mandate "social responsibility." Not consistent, not fair.

As to the argument that people need a living wage to feed their families (or "to put food on their family," as our President said), I was taught that you do better by advancing your skills. What value do you bring to an employer? Get a degree — high school, college or higher — earn more. Learn a new skill, get a raise. Cause and effect. We cannot legislate what some businesses in some areas pay some of their workers.

And for those who reject all of the above, just go back to your "community standards" argument. The community voted.

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.

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LOCAL



Project's critics contend more changes needed

COMPLEX, from page 1

initially proposed to the community and where we are now is a big improvement."

However, some nearby residents are still worried about the project's size and the impact it could have on the traffic and parking in their neighborhood.

The neighbors formed a committee within OPCO to address their concerns and wrote a stinging report on the Main and Pacific project, which split from the neighborhood group's unflinching traditional support of affordable housing.

A competing report was written by OPCO's Affordable Housing committee, which endorsed the project and the goal of providing more affordable housing in Ocean Park.

The two groups would likely have fought when the Main and Pacific project was taken through the public review process at City Hall until the City Council late last month enacted an ordinance precluding all affordable housing projects with fewer than 50 units from public input.

That means, as long as a project conforms to all applicable city laws and zoning codes, it will be approved. Similar market-rate projects will still require public review before given city approval.

Many times in the past, public review has been used by residents who want to kill an affordable housing proposal in their neighborhood or slow the approval down for so long that it becomes prohibitive for the developer to build there, officials said.

City officials also cited a report indi-

cating only a fraction of the affordable housing mandated under city law would be built in the following few years. The ordinance would help speed up new affordable housing projects, officials said.

However, by enacting the ordinance some residents felt their input on the Pacific and Main project had been taken away. When the DSRC met with Community Corp. last week, some members wanted to get whatever concessions they could because there would be nearly no other chance, sources said.

And to others the concessions made by CCSM were minor, and no where near the scope that needed to be made to alleviate the strain on the surrounding neighborhood, they said.

While DSRC member Mary Marlow, a nearby neighbor of the proposed project, said she believes the changes were a good start, much more needed to be done. That's why she voted against approving the proposal.

"I guess I'm in the minority and not happy with the outcome because nothing changed much," she said. "They just got some good free advice. I don't think the project will change much more than this."

But Ling said there is always a chance for the project to change before it's built. And she said Community Corp. has a history of taking residents' suggestions, so there's always a chance more can be changed, she said.

"Nothing is set in concrete until literally it's set in concrete and the building is completely built," she said.

Volunteers put themselves in high stress environment

ANGELS, from page 1

keeping patients and their families informed of the progress. They also do errands for doctors which frees them up to focus on treating the patients and give support to whomever needs it.

"Nobody goes willingly to the emergency room; you are under duress and stress," Melgun said. "They are scared and if we can ease them in, that's very rewarding to us."

Melgun recalls an 85-year-old woman who was an E.R. patient a few months ago. She was Russian and couldn't speak English. Melgun couldn't speak Russian, but she stayed with the woman so she wouldn't be alone.

"She held both of my hands and even though we couldn't talk to each other, she would kiss my hand as a way to communicate with me," Melgun said.

Melgun, who has worked as an information systems specialist, among other things for more than 40 years in the corporate world, said she gets more satisfaction being an angel in the E.R. than in any of her careers.

"I've never been so well compensated when (the patients) are so grateful," she said. "It's worth a million bucks."

In many emergency rooms, patients with non-life threatening illness will sit for hours waiting for treatment. And it's common in many emergency rooms that patients get little information before a doctor can see them.

That's not always the case at Saint

John's, where the angels check on patients every 15 minutes. The hospital also has a service called "Fast Track," which guarantees that a patient who needs quick treatment will be in and out of the emergency room in an hour or less.

Dr. Russ Kino, medical director of the emergency room at Saint John's, said the angels are a Godsend because they free up the medical staff so they focus on healing the ill and wounded.

"More than anyplace else, this program is needed in the E.R.," Dr. Kino said. "They have been a huge help for the staff and I think the quality of what we do here has gone up a notch."

What separates Saint John's E.R. volunteer program from others is the experience that each angel carries with them.

"They usually have been through a lot and have the balance and maturity through life experience," Dr. Kino said.

Dr. Kino recalls a heart attack victim who died in the E.R. He had the unpleasant task of informing the man's family that he couldn't be saved. Dr. Kino said he asked an angel to accompany him and by circumstance, the woman had recently lost her husband the same way.

"She stepped in and took over," Dr. Kino said. "It left me speechless."

When Melgun returns home each Tuesday after her four-hour shift, she recovers by letting her husband, Alex, cook her lunch while she unwinds in her robe and slippers.

"It's a frantic pace," she said.

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ENTERTAINMENT

Anna Paquin has done a fantastic job coming of age

BY SEAN DALY

Special to the Daily Press

Anna Paquin could have ended up like many former child stars: unemployed, penniless or worse yet, in jail. She could have squandered her paychecks from movies like "X-Men", "Finding Forrester", and "A Walk On The Moon." And she could have been forced to hawk the Oscar she won at age 11 for "The Piano" to support an alcohol or drug habit. Luckily, none of that happened.

Today, at 20, the girl who once dreamed of becoming Prime Minister of New Zealand is a sophomore at Columbia University and a true-life Hollywood success story — one of the rare few who has successfully bridged the gap from childhood phenom to sought-after, adult actress.

In an industry notorious for seducing its youth with the lure of bright lights and easy money, Paquin has managed to keep her nose clean thanks to what she calls "a really supportive and protective family." Dad, Brian, is a high school phys. ed. instructor. Mom, Mary, is an English teacher.

"They realized how important it was to make sure I still had a childhood as well as getting to do something I really wanted to do. That way I wasn't missing out on something that I can never get back," says the Canadian-born actress, who plans to spend the Christmas holidays with her father's side of the family in Winnipeg. That's where she lived with brother Andrew (a Harvard grad, now 25) and sister, Katya, 22, until 1986. It's her first trip back in nearly seven years. "I have no idea what one does in Winnipeg," she admits with a laugh. "I just remember it's really cold. Every childhood photo of mine is in a snowsuit!"

Today the fresh-faced Kiwi is safe and warm, sipping a cup of fresh brewed coffee inside her 16th floor suite at the Essex House Hotel. She is wearing faded gray denim jeans and a tight black long sleeve lycra shirt, and sporting conspicuous pink streaks in her naturally straight brown hair. "There's not a whole lot you can do with brittle, broken, damaged, cracked up hair," she reveals, "so I dye it a different color to divert attention."

Cosmetic challenges notwithstanding, 2002 was a banner year for Paquin, who briefly put her studies on hold to appear in "X-Men 2" (opening in May), the London stage production of "This Is Our Youth", and director Spike Lee's new drama, "25th Hour". "I'm going back next semester," she assures, with a smile.

"25th Hour", now playing, is the fictional story of Monty Brogan (Edward Norton), a convicted drug dealer, who has 24 hours to spend connecting with family and friends before beginning a seven year jail term. Paquin stars Mary D'Annunzio, a seductive and free-spirited 17 year-old who becomes the obsession of Brogan's much older friend (Phillip Seymour Hoffman).

"She's got the tattoo and the bellybutton ring...she's sexy -- all the things that he never was and never will be," Hoffman explains. Paquin took over the role at the last moment when Brittany Murphy suddenly dropped out.

In between projects, Paquin recently began studying ballet. With "six or seven" classes a week, it's one of the few non-work-related activities she admits to doing well. But, Paquin adds, "I can tell you a billion things I do badly."

Basketball, for one. "I am probably the worst player you will ever meet," she reveals, blushing from embarrassment. But don't dismiss the slender 5' 5" actress as a non-athlete. In her free time, Paquin enjoys rugby, swimming, gymnastics and downhill skiing. She may not be Michael Jordan, but she does have at least one good hoops story. Paquin begins to laugh and her thick New Zealand accent becomes more pronounced as she recalls the night talk show host David Letterman invited her to attempt a foul shot for a prize of \$10,000.00.

Guess what? She made it!

"So as a joke, he handed me the \$10,000.00," Paquin recalls, making clear that she never really expected to keep the prize money. "There was absolutely was no misunderstanding on my part, but when people heard the next day that little Anna didn't get the money, some (of them) thought that I was having \$10,000.00 taken away from me, which really wasn't the situation whatsoever."

To set the record straight, Paquin returned to the program the following evening and along with Letterman, donated all of the cash to the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

Such a story might seem even more special, had the young actress not already stolen moviegoers hearts on Oscar night in 1993, when she was the surprise (and surprised) winner of the coveted gold statue for Best Supporting Actress. The honor was granted for her portrayal of Holly Hunter's angry young daughter, Flora, in Jane Campion's "The Piano". She remains the second youngest winner in the history of the Academy — and the first ever from New Zealand.

"I had no career until I made 'The Piano,'" she explains. "That was the first acting experience I ever had." (Unless, of course, you count her role as a skunk in her elementary school play in Lower Hut, a suburb of Wellington).

Paquin doesn't like to talk that much about her big win anymore — mostly out of modesty. She claims to keep her trophy in storage because "there are no mannequins at Columbia." But the truth is she doesn't want to show off. Nor does Paquin seem to care for the movie star treatment. Although reports have said she arrived to her first day at college in a limousine, the actress insists she rides the subway almost everyday.

"(At school) I don't really feel like a celebrity," she says. "I think by now the novelty has kind of work off that I was something different. Besides, I'm definitely not the only somewhat recognizable face at school."

She's right. In recent years, there have been more young stars in class at Columbia than on the set of "Dawson's Creek." The ivy-clad buildings have been a home away from home to Julia Stiles ("Save The Last Dance"), Rider Strong ("Boy Meets World") and Joseph Gordon Leavitt ("Ten Things I Hate About You"), among others.

But why with a successful film career and millions of dollars in the bank, would Paquin feel the need to attend school at all? "I really wanted an education," she insists. "I want to be knowledgeable about a lot of different things, not just acting."

Perhaps therein lies the secret to Paquin's remarkable coming of age.

STATE



Aerial firefighting fleet under pressure to modernize

BY DON THOMPSON
Associated Press Writer

CHICO — They're among the last of the barnstormers, the plane jockeys who fly World War II-era bombers through blinding smoke and wrenching turbulence to dump retardant chemicals on wildfires.

They grew out of that tradition, piloting planes until they broke and often beyond, sometimes working and sleeping in crude quarters for months at a time so long as there were fires to be fought.

"You fly this big airplane down into these little canyons and think, 'What the hell are we doing here?'" said Dean Talley, who has flown airtankers for 24 years.

Pilots such as Talley spent a record number of hours in the air last summer, as fires scorched miles of matchstick-dry forest across the West. After decades of fire suppression, there's enough fuel built up to keep them flying for many summers to come.

But after two airtankers disintegrated in mid-air this summer, killing their crews, critics say it's time the nation's aerial firefighting fleet be treated more like commercial airliners and less like chewing-gum-and-baling-wire cropdusters.

"Simply put, the lives of the men and women who fly these aircraft are in constant jeopardy, and so are the lives and property of the people they are supposed to protect," said U.S. Rep. Jim Gibbons, R-Nev.

He called the federal government's lack of safety standards and short-funding of the private contractors who provide the planes and pilots "appalling" and "intolerable."

Jim Lyons, who directed the Forest Service as assistant agriculture secretary for natural resources during the Clinton administration, talks of altering the fire culture.

In commercial airliners, "if two coffee makers went out at the same time, that was a major problem," said Walt Darran, safety committee chairman for the Associated Airtanker Pilots and the California Fire Pilots Association, who has flown both tankers and commercial aircraft.

But airtanker crashes have been considered "just part of the job," Darran said.

"Everybody likes to minimize the losses, but part of it's (a lack of) money and part of it's a lack of appropriate standards."

Jim Hall, the former National Transportation Safety Board chairman who co-chaired a special committee reviewing the summer's crashes, said it's time for the government to end "a double standard when it comes to safety."

That standard dates to the industry's beginnings following World War II, when surplus warplanes were plentiful. Ex-military pilots came in with a combat mentality, an attitude that in many ways survives to this day. Companies began on a shoestring and often collapsed just as quickly.

"Planes were cheap," said Talley, whose father crewed bombers in the war. "If you lost an airplane, you just pulled another one out of the stack."

Harold "Buzz" Schaffer flew five years for Hawkins & Powers Aviation Inc. of Greybull, Wyo., until this spring.

"When I took off I figured as long as the airplane was going to hold together and I had a power plant to push it through the air, I was a happy man," said Schaffer.

Both planes that crashed this summer belonged to Hawkins & Powers, as did since-grounded C-119s that lost wings in 1987 and 1979. A plane that crashed under similar circumstances in 1994 previously belonged to the company.

Hawkins & Powers co-owner Duane Powers and U.S. Forest Service safety officer Barb Hall said much has changed already as companies use better technology to inspect and maintain its aging airtanker fleets.

"Back in the early years there were a lot of accidents, but over the last 10 years or so the record has really improved," said Barb Hall, who was called upon to defend the Forest Service's contracting system after this summer's crashes.

"It's almost like having a black sheep in your family," said Powers. "If you look at the industry 20, 30 years ago, the industry's entirely different today."

Bill Waldman refused to fly the C-119s after the company he worked for — now-defunct Hemet Valley Flying Service — had one break apart in mid-air in 1981.

"I have a lot of memories of the C-119 — all bad," he said. "After the second one, I said, 'Guys, after the third one goes down, that'll end the program.'"

"When you're just flying along and the wing comes off, there's not a damn thing you can do about it," he said. "They're hard to fly when the wings come off."

But Waldman was also among airtanker pilots who said the industry is much improved as the worst companies have been weeded out.

Talley, too, survived several near misses with a series of slipshod, now failed aerial firefighting contractors that in hindsight "probably epitomized what's wrong with this industry."

One company lost two of the 19 planes it contracted to fly and maintain for the state of California one summer — but collected \$200,000 in insurance it had taken out on the two dead pilots.

Talley flew gliders as a boy, soloed at age 14, and flew Coast Guard search and rescue missions out of Miami.

He turned down an airline job to fly

crop-dusters for \$3.50 an hour, until he signed up with Aero Union Corp. as a co-pilot in the summer of 1978. He left a year later rather than haul fish around Alaska for "\$500 a month and all the salmon you could eat."

He went back to Aero Union in 1989, where he now has benefits like health insurance and 401(k) plans that "were just wishes and hopes 20 years ago."

Talley and Waldman were among airtanker pilots, industry experts and a government inspector who held Aero Union out as an example of a company that has been able to maintain high standards while competing for government low bids.

Company officials worry the government is about to reject the use of perfectly serviceable aircraft just because they're old. Court records show Aero Union spent \$3 million to modify each old military plane it obtained from the government, and the company says the planes have since been regularly inspected and upgraded.

Daily Planet bought by couple

By The Associated Press

BERKELEY — The Berkeley Daily Planet has been purchased by a Berkeley couple who plan to reintroduce the newspaper and focus on local news and features.

Michael and Becky O'Malley bought the defunct paper from parent company Bigfoot Media.

Michael O'Malley is a retired professor, and Becky O'Malley is a member of the Landmarks Preservation Commission. Both have been active in Berkeley politics for years.

In mid-December the O'Malleys purchased the paper's name, the newspaper racks, software and the remainder of the office's lease for an undisclosed price. Becky O'Malley said the paper could begin publishing once or twice a week in late January.

No specific editorial decisions have been made, but Becky O'Malley expects

the paper will continue to cover City Hall and schools. She hopes to get contributions from local residents about lifestyle topics, such as a column that the previous Daily Planet carried about architecture.

"We think the Berkeley audience is interested in two things: in what the local government is doing, and then, often, particularly on the West Coast, if you see lifestyle stories that come from services, they're often not relative to Northern California," Becky O'Malley said Monday. "It's possible to get locally relevant copy in those areas."

The couple owned a software business that they sold in the mid-1990s, and Becky O'Malley said she has worked previously with the Center for Investigative Reporting.

The former Daily Planet closed in November after three and a half years of publishing six days a week.

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STATE



photo courtesy Associated Press

Warning signs are posted along the entire drainage system of the Quicksilver Mines, as seen in this undated photo on the shores of Almaden Lake in San Jose.

Abandoned mine pollutes S.F. Bay with mercury

By The Associated Press

SAN JOSE — Scientists say an old Santa Clara County mine is the biggest source of mercury pollution in the San Francisco Bay.

Cleanup of the contamination, which runs along more than 20 miles of the Guadalupe River, through San Jose and into the bay, could be a multimillion dollar effort.

The New Almaden Quicksilver Mine in the hills near San Jose operated for more than 120 years before it closed in 1975.

Scrap from the operation was dumped into nearby creeks or used to make roads, and erosion sent debris into the Guadalupe. Tetra Tech Inc., a consultant for the Santa Clara Valley Water District, estimates that about 17 million of the 84 million pounds of the mine's mercury was left in the environment.

The mine, once the biggest mercury mine in North America, was actually seven different mines on almost 8,600 acres with 45 miles of tunnels. The metal was used to make dental fillings, chlorine, batteries, thermometers, dyes, floor waxes and detonators for explosives.

"The mine is the single most significant source of mercury to the bay," Tom Mumley, an engineer at the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board, told the San Francisco Chronicle.

Mercury levels in the Guadalupe River in San Jose's center are five times higher than they are in the bay — and levels in the bay are 100 times higher than in similar bodies that are not fed by streams carrying mine waste, such as Puget Sound.

Fish absorb the mercury through their gills and store it in their flesh. Birds that eat the fish are in turn contaminated by the metal, which kills embryos in their eggs.

"Pretty much consistently, birds nesting in the bay have more mercury in their eggs than birds outside the bay," said Steve Schwarzbach, a biologist with the U.S. Geological Survey.

People also are affected when they eat contaminated fish — children and pregnant or nursing women have been warned by the state Environmental Protection Agency to limit their consumption of fish caught in the bay to once a month.

Mercury damages the nervous system, especially the brain, and can adversely affect intelligence, coordination and memory.

**"Pretty much consistently,
birds nesting in the
bay have more mercury
in their eggs than birds
outside the bay."**

— **STEVE SCHWARZBACH**
Biologist

Under federal law, the state must limit toxic chemicals in the bay.

Santa Clara County bought 2,455 acres of the land in 1973 for a park. Now, along with the city of San Jose and the local water agency, the county may have to spend millions on cleanup.

Contamination led the federal government to declare the area a Superfund site in the 1980s. The county spent \$6 million to clean it up, capping the main furnace, planting vegetation, putting in rock to protect streams from erosion and excavating mine wastes.

The site was subsequently removed from the Superfund list and is considered safe for people.

"We've invested significant resources into the cleanup of the park, and it's not apparent to us at this time what are the impacts to the watershed from mercury," said County parks Director Killough said. "We need to get more information before we get on board."

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NATIONAL



Stores offer expanded hours, deep discounts for holidays

BY ANNE D'INNOCENZIO

AP Business Writer

NEW YORK — Retailers who have watched with dismay as the pre-Christmas rush hasn't materialized in big bucks are now hoping customers will show up in the next few days — and even after the holiday season.

"The season is reflecting great spending caution and could be the weakest in a dozen years," said Kurt Barnard, president of Barnard's Retail Trend Report.

Retailers had a good start to the season with a better-than-expected sales during the Thanksgiving weekend, but sales subsequently were surprisingly weak. Analysts say consumers have cut back on their spending because of worries about job security and the economy's uncertain recovery.

Shoppers over the weekend were searching for the best price, and retailers were accommodating them with two-for-one specials and other deep discounts.

At K-B Toys Inc., "we are happy that we are holding ground, but we were really hoping for a higher increase" during the weekend, spokesman John Reilly said Sunday.

At Sears, Roebuck and Co., the company offered a 10 percent discount on nearly everything in the store from 7 a.m. to 10 a.m. on Saturday. Gloves and other cold weather merchandise, as well as digital cameras and jewelry did well, according to Ted McDougal, a company spokesman.

Still, business over the weekend was in line with the company's modest holiday expectations, which is for a mid single digit sales decline.

K-B Toys, which offered discounts anywhere from 10 percent to 30 percent,

reported that while customer traffic was strong, sales only showed a slight gain from a year ago.

The retailer is now focusing on the final days of the month to recoup business.

Barnard believes sales at stores that have been open at least a year, known as same-store sales, could fall below his already reduced 2 percent forecast. Same-store sales are considered the best indicator of a retailer's health.

"It was a solid weekend, but retailers

needed a spectacular weekend," said C. Britt Beemer, chairman of America's Research Group. "It was what I expected, but not what I hoped."

Shoppers interviewed this weekend liked the lower prices.

"I guess I am looking for more bargains than normal," said Leon Fenhaus, who found diamond jewelry discounted up to 50 percent at the Empire Mall in Sioux Falls, S.D.

But the heavy markdowns might take a

toll on retailers' earnings, an especially painful result, because many merchants hope to bring in half their annual profits during the holidays.

Last week, a number of stores, including Electronics Boutique, Best Buy Co. Inc., and Barnes & Noble Inc. reduced their fourth-quarter earnings.

Even Wal-Mart Stores Inc., the world's largest retailer, is seeing sales at the low end of its projections for a 3 percent to 5 percent gain in December.

New charges link student, Sept. 11 financier

BY LARRY NEUMEISTER

Associated Press Writer

NEW YORK — An Arab graduate student who visited Web sites about dangerous chemicals and had information on U.S. dams and railroads was charged Monday with lying to the FBI about phone calls to a financier of the Sept. 11 attacks.

Ali Saleh Kahliah Al-Marri was charged in federal court in New York, where he was already scheduled to go to trial Jan. 13 on charges he unlawfully possessed more than 15 credit cards.

On Monday, Al-Marri was also charged with lying to FBI agents in December 2001 when he said he had not called a telephone number used by Mustafa Ahmed al-Hawsawi in the United Arab Emirates.

Prosecutors have said al-Hawsawi transferred tens of thousands of dollars to the hijackers before the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the

Pentagon.

Prosecutors said Al-Marri also lied to agents about aspects of his background during an October 2001 interview at his Peoria, Ill., home.

Al-Marri allegedly told the FBI that he was a Qatari citizen who came to the United States in September 2001 on a student visa to study for a master's degree in computer information systems at Bradley University. He said he was last in this country in 1991, when he attended Bradley as an undergraduate.

But prosecutors say Al-Marri reentered the United States in May 2000, when he used a stolen Social Security number to open fraudulent credit card accounts. They say he left the United States in August of that year.

A message left with Al-Marri's lawyer was not immediately returned.

During a December 2001 search of Al-Marri's computer, FBI agents found an Arabic oath or prayer asking God to "protect" and "guard" Osama bin Laden,

audio files containing lectures by bin Laden and his associates and pictures of the Sept. 11 attacks, prosecutors said.

They said the computer also contained lists of Web sites with titles such as "Jihad arena" and "Taliban."

One computer folder called "chem" contained bookmarked Web sites providing fact sheets for hazardous substances, the amounts of certain chemicals "immediately dangerous to life or health" and information on how to buy them, prosecutors said.

In addition, the computer contained bookmarked Web sites relating to weaponry and satellite equipment and computer files containing more than 1,000 credit cards, the majority of which had been fraudulently used, prosecutors said.

In a search of Al-Marri's home after his arrest, agents found an almanac with bookmarked pages providing information about major U.S. dams, reservoirs, waterways and railroads, they said.



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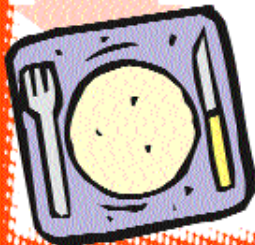
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NATIONAL

GOP choose Frist as new Senate leader to help repair Lott damage

BY JESSE J. HOLLAND
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON

Senate Majority Leader-elect Bill Frist of Tennessee promised on Monday to help heal the Republican Party and to repair the racial division caused by the party's former leader.

"We must dedicate ourselves to healing those wounds of division that have been reopened so prominently in the last few weeks," Frist said.

Senate Republicans unanimously elected Frist as their new leader during an unprecedented 45-minute conference call among most of the 51-member Senate Republican Caucus, ending a two-week political firestorm that brought down former leader Trent Lott and threatened to derail the GOP's efforts to reach out to minorities.

"I told our colleagues that my intentions are indeed to serve, not be served, so that we together as a group we will be able to capture what is truly remarkable in ... that wonderful institution called the United States Senate," Frist said.

The 50-year-old Frist, a wealthy heart surgeon, officially becomes Senate majority leader when the GOP takes control of the chamber in January.

More than 40 senators participated in the conference call, and elected Frist unanimously with a voice vote, senators said.

Lott, R-Miss., spoke for more than three minutes, and sounded very gracious and thankful — "as enthusiastic as anyone could possibly sound in that circumstance," the source said. Lott offered to do whatever he could to help the new leadership team, the source added.

Lott thanked everyone for "their support and their prayers," said Sen. Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania, the No. 3 GOP leader.

But "no one felt good about what's gone on for the last few weeks," Santorum added.

Santorum said the party's top priorities in January will



Pablo Martinez Monsivais/Associated Press

Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa., right, and Sen. George Allen, R-Va., right, speak with Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, via a speakerphone, prior to meeting by telephone with fellow Republican senators to elect Sen. Bill Frist as the new Senate majority leader, on Capitol Hill Monday in Washington.

be extending unemployment benefits for the jobless, and finishing the Fiscal 2003 budget. "We are now back on track and ready to move forward in a positive vein," Santorum said.

President Bush issued a statement congratulating Frist and saying the Tennessean "has earned the trust and respect of his colleagues on both sides of the aisle."

Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas, said: "With Bill Frist as our new leader, we can now focus our attention on the important issues facing our country."

Frist, who participated in the call from his Nashville, Tenn., office, is considered an authority on health issues in the Senate. He still keeps his starched white lab coat in the trunk of his car, makes monthly visits to hospitals and clinics and goes on occasional overseas medical missions. When the anthrax scare surfaced on Capitol Hill last year, he worked to calm his colleagues.

The election originally was scheduled for Jan. 6 — when all senators return to Washington for the beginning of the new congressional session — but several Republican senators wanted to try and put

Lott's controversy behind them before returning to the Capitol to work.

Lott lost the confidence of the Senate GOP after remarks earlier this month at a birthday party for Sen. Strom Thurmond, R-S.C., praising the retiring senator's 1948 pro-segregation presidential campaign.

The GOP now is counting on Frist to project the image of a party open to minorities as they prepare to take control of the Senate and confront a host of difficult issues. And with senators still scattered around the country for the holidays, a telephone conference was the only way to get enough lawmakers in one spot to quickly put Frist in place.

Lott, 61, relinquished the job in the wake of severe political repercussions over his racially insensitive remarks earlier this month at a birthday party for Thurmond, R-S.C. Lott apologized several times, but to no avail.

Lott will remain in the Senate, but not in a leadership role. Republican sources said it appeared that Lott, a senator since 1989, had waited too long to end the controversy and lost any leverage he might have had to cut a deal to become a committee chairman.

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INTERNATIONAL



North Korea removes U.N. seals from nuclear lab

BY CHRISTOPHER TORCHIA
Associated Press Writer

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea said Monday the “nuclear issue” could be settled if Washington signs a nonaggression treaty with it.

North Korea’s appeal for a deal, a day after it began removing U.N. seals and tampering with surveillance equipment at frozen nuclear facilities, suggests it wants to push the United States into talks by ramping up fears of a nuclear crisis.

“If the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula is to be settled properly, the U.S. should stop posing a nuclear threat to the DPRK and accept the DPRK’s proposal for the conclusion of a nonaggression treaty between the two countries,” the North’s official newspaper, Rodong Simmun, said in an editorial. DPRK stands for Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

North Korea repeatedly has demanded such a treaty, but U.S. officials say it first must take steps to abandon nuclear development before talks can occur. The dispute resembles a 1994 nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula that some say nearly led to war.

The United States, which is preparing for possible war against Iraq, says it wants a peaceful solution to the Korean problem. Russia, South Korea, Japan and other U.S. allies also have expressed alarm about the developments.

Pyongyang’s speedy moves to reacti-

vate nuclear facilities frozen under a 1994 deal with Washington have startled some in the Bush administration.

“North Korea is trying to create a situation where the United States must come to the table,” said Paik Hak-soon, a North Korea expert at the Sejong Institute, an independent research center in Seoul.

Paik speculated that North Korea was eager to negotiate now, fearing U.S. success in a war against Iraq would embolden Washington to increase pressure on the North about its weapons of mass destruction.

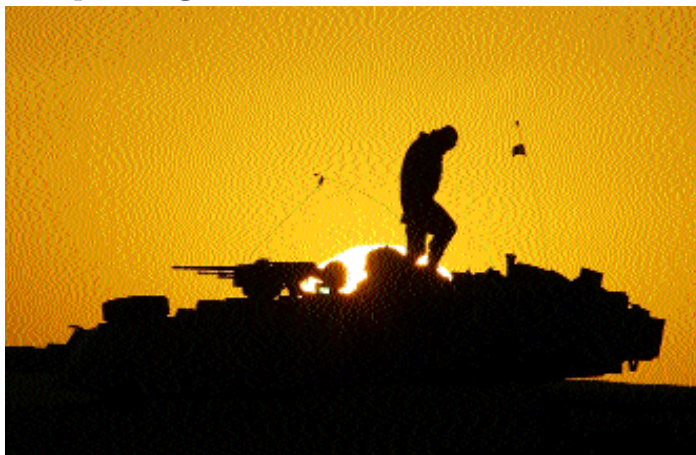
North Korea often has accused the United States, its foe in the 1950-1953 Korean War, of plotting its downfall and says the 37,000 U.S. soldiers stationed in South Korea are the vanguard of an invasion force.

North Korea on Monday began removing U.N. seals and “disrupting” cameras at a laboratory used to extract weapons-grade plutonium from spent fuel rods, the U.N. nuclear watchdog said.

The Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency, or IAEA, said Pyongyang this weekend unsealed a storage chamber holding 8,000 irradiated fuel rods. Security analysts say plutonium in the rods could yield four or five nuclear weapons within months, and North Korea probably made one or two such weapons in the 1990s.

North Korea says it is reactivating the 5-megawatt, Soviet-designed reactor in

Preparing for war



Anja Niedringhaus/Associated Press

A U.S. soldier walks atop his armored vehicle at sunset as he prepares for a night military exercise, in the Kuwaiti desert south of the Iraqi border on Sunday. The U.S. Army launched its biggest maneuver in the Kuwaiti desert since the Gulf War on Saturday, throwing thousands of soldiers and hundreds of armored vehicles into live-fire exercises to sharpen their skills ahead of a possible new war with Iraq.

Yongbyon, 50 miles north of Pyongyang, to generate electricity because Washington reneged on a promise to provide energy.

IAEA and U.S. officials disputed those claims Monday.

“Reprocessing spent fuel and producing plutonium have absolutely no rationale in terms of peaceful activities in North Korea,” IAEA director-general Mohamed ElBaradei told CNN. “It’s a pretty danger-

ous situation.”

In Washington, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said North Korea’s claim about generating electricity does not hold up to analysis.

“They don’t need a nuclear power plant,” Rumsfeld said. “The power grid couldn’t even absorb that.”

Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Richard Myers said the plant “adds negligible electricity to the power grid.”

Gulf War veterans prepare young troops for war with Iraq

BY PATRICK MCDOWELL
Associated Press Writer

SOUTH OF THE KUWAIT-IRAQ BORDER — When Eric Olson was 19, he drove a tank in the U.S.-led blitz to drive Saddam Hussein’s occupying army out of Kuwait.

For 50 hours, Olson fought sleep and fear at the controls and kept moving in a high-tech, violent battle that turned much of the Iraqi army into a blasted trail of pulverized vehicles and bodies as they tried retreating to Baghdad.

Today, Olson is 31 and sergeant of 2nd Platoon, Alpha Company. He is one of the Gulf War veterans passing down experiences from 11 years ago to help train a new generation to take on Saddam again if war breaks out.

“Out here, the only law is who’s a better shot, who’s a quicker trigger,” said Olson, of Fort Lauderdale, Fla. “I don’t know if my past will give them an edge, but it will possibly give them insightfulness on what they might have to expect in the very near future.”

Gulf War old hands are hardly rare in the military, but since the ground war was fought primarily by tanks and armored infantry, the Army’s 3rd Infantry Division — one of its two armored divisions — has a high proportion of veterans.

They were prominent in weekend live-fire maneuvers in the Kuwaiti desert involving the division’s 2nd Brigade, put-

“I don’t know if my past will give them an edge, but it will possibly give them insightfulness on what they might have to expect in the very near future.”

— ERIC OLSON
Gulf War veteran

ting thousands of soldiers and hundreds of tanks and armored vehicles through the largest exercises in the border area since the Gulf War.

The Gulf War-era tank drivers are now senior sergeants, the company commanders now lead battalions. Their graying hair stands out among young soldiers mostly in their early 20s, facing war for the first time.

One is 1st Lt. Ryan Kuo, 25, of Reno, Nev., a West Pointer who leads Olson’s 2nd Platoon and says his experience of the Gulf War was “sitting on the couch and watching it on CNN.”

Though they are separated by only a few years, the life experiences between the sergeant and lieutenant are much wider. Their partnership is vital to their unit’s success. Both are highly confident about the focus of their troops and in the superiority of their equipment.

The knowledge passed down by the veterans brings a dose of reality to what until now has been a military career marked by training exercises.

“Some of the stories you hear about the remains of bodies that you cross after

they’ve been destroyed, the attacks they’ve done — obviously, that’s going to create hesitancy, as any war would,” Kuo said.

But Kuo added, “these guys help us out a lot in terms of confidence and the experiences they’ve had while they were here in 1991 in allowing us to train realistically.”

The training conditions are harsh. The Kuwaiti desert is flat and devoid of vegetation. There is no shelter from sand-filled winds howling up to 60 mph. The nighttime winter temperatures drop to near freezing.

Those fighting conditions are ideal, however, compared to the scorching heat of the Kuwaiti summer, which is harder on equipment and men and means the force will lose much of its effectiveness.

The men see the end of March as the deadline for a fight and expect to be the first tanks crossing the border if efforts to peacefully divest Saddam of weapons of mass destruction fail.

Commanders are ordering their troops to get in the habit of conserving water, fuel and food. They are likely to live on what they carry until the attack is over.

Lt. Col. Eric Schwartz commands the

battalion task force including Alpha Company, which he led during the Gulf War. The Army is more high-tech these days, but a chief focus of training is to give his soldiers confidence and focus.

“It’s the human aspect,” Schwartz said. “How do you motivate young soldiers to go into an environment that’s absolutely terrifying?”

Not all the new troops are youngsters. At 33, Pfc. Andrew K. Burt, of Raleigh, N.C., is older than his company commander and platoon sergeant and lieutenant.

Burt signed up nine months ago, motivated by Sept. 11 and a poor job market. The experience of Olson, his veteran sergeant, brings a feeling of security that “we’ll make it through OK,” he said.

“He tells us a lot about what to expect, what we have to be prepared for physically and emotionally,” Burt said. “He said it would be something that would weigh heavily on us for some time to come afterward, but that we’d get through it.”

Unlike in 1991, the area is no longer strange to American troops. The United States has maintained a brigade-sized force in Kuwait since the end of the Gulf War as a deterrent against attack. The brigades rotate every six months and are experienced in ways of the desert.

Some things haven’t changed. Olson said that his memories of the buildup to the Gulf War include camaraderie, “the guys lying on top of the tank. That’s coming back again.”

DID YOU KNOW?: The world’s average school year is 200 days per year. In the US, it is 180 days; in Sweden 170 days, in Japan it is 243 days.



SPORTS

San Francisco 49ers still don't know playoff opponent

BY GREG BEACHAM
AP Sports Writer

SANTA CLARA —
The NFC wild-card race is

still a jumbled mess, so Steve Mariucci and his assistant coaches will spend another long week studying film on two teams

the San Francisco 49ers probably won't play.

The 49ers (10-5) still don't know their playoff opponent for the first Sunday in January at Candlestick Park. It could be Atlanta, the New York Giants or New Orleans, depending on the outcome of the final weekend's games.

After a long rest from Saturday's 17-14 victory over Arizona, San Francisco finishes the regular season with a meaningless game next Monday night in St. Louis. The NFC West champions' coaches will spend a whole lot more time worrying about the Giants, Saints and Falcons this week than they'll spend on the Rams.

"There's still three teams that we have to prepare for," Mariucci said Sunday. "What you do is you start breaking down their film to get them into the computer, but it takes a lot of work to break those things down. You just work later into the night. We did get a jump on it last week, but it just makes the week a little longer."

The 49ers, mindful of

the short week of preparation they'll get for their first home playoff game in four years, plan to rest several regulars against St. Louis. Receiver Terrell Owens sat out against the Cardinals and is unlikely to play, while Pro Bowl quarterback Jeff Garcia and lineman Ron Stone probably won't make more than token appearances.

Several other players are likely to sit out, but Mariucci must make his decisions based on the health of his players and the readiness of their backups. "We haven't gone through all that yet," Mariucci said. "We'll do that as the week progresses. Right now, everybody is a possibility. None of those decisions have really been made quite yet."

Throughout their mostly successful season, Mariucci and his players have done their best not to complain about the 49ers' onerous schedule. It began with a five-game preseason featuring a trip to Japan, followed by the very first game and the very last game of the regular season.

But Mariucci also realizes the 49ers' regular-season finale puts them in a tougher spot to prepare for their playoff game — even if they already knew their opponent.

"I'm wondering if a Monday night game should really be played that last week," Mariucci said. "Let's face it, both of these (teams) could have been playing in the playoffs. To have that short week to prepare, it's really a disadvantage."

So the 49ers will try to do much of their preparation this week. The coaches will formulate a game plan against all three potential opponents, and players will study as well. Of the three possible opponents, the 49ers faced only the Saints in the regular season, losing at the Superdome.

San Francisco was efficient but unspectacular against the free-falling Cardinals, moving the ball

well all afternoon but scoring just two touchdowns — one on the first possession of each half. The Niners' inability to finish drives and rookie Jeff Chandler's two missed field goals made the final score much closer than it probably should have been, but Mariucci wasn't complaining after clinching San Francisco's second

straight 10-win season.

The 49ers have nothing to gain from a victory over the Rams — except the prestige of winning all six of their NFC West games and beating once-mighty St. Louis twice. The Niners chased their oldest rivals for the last three seasons before surging past them this fall with a victory in October.

Going to the hoop



Steve Yeater/Associated Press

Sacramento Kings forward Peja Stojakovic, right, drives past Golden State Warriors guard Mike Dunleavy during the second half in Sacramento on Sunday. The Kings won 103-88.

2002-03 College Bowl at a Glance

By The Associated Press

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 25

■ Las Vegas Bowl, \$800,000
UCLA (7-5) vs. New Mexico (7-6), 4:30 p.m. (ESPN)
■ Hawaii Bowl at Honolulu, \$750,000
Tulane (7-5) vs. Hawaii (10-3), 8 p.m. (ESPN)

THURSDAY, DEC. 26

■ Motor City Bowl at Detroit, \$780,000
Toledo (9-4) vs. Boston College (8-4), 5 p.m. (ESPN)
■ Insight Bowl at Phoenix, \$750,000
Oregon State (8-4) vs. Pittsburgh (8-4), 8:30 p.m. (ESPN)

FRIDAY, DEC. 27

■ Houston Bowl, \$750,000
Southern Mississippi (7-5) vs. Oklahoma State (7-5), 1 p.m. (ESPN)
■ Independence Bowl at Shreveport, La., \$1.2M
Nebraska (7-6) vs. Mississippi (6-6), 4:30 p.m. (ESPN)
■ Holiday Bowl at San Diego, \$2M
Kansas State (10-2) vs. Arizona State (8-5), 8 p.m. (ESPN)

SATURDAY, DEC. 28

■ Alamo Bowl at San Antonio, \$1.35M
Colorado (9-4) vs. Wisconsin (7-6), 8 p.m. (ESPN)
■ Continental Tire Bowl at Charlotte, N.C., \$750,000
West Virginia (9-3) vs. Virginia (8-5), 11 a.m. (ESPN2)

MONDAY, DEC. 30

■ Music City Bowl at Nashville, Tenn., \$750,000
Minnesota (7-5) vs. Arkansas (9-4), 2 p.m. (ESPN)
■ Seattle Bowl, \$1M
Wake Forest (6-6) vs. Oregon (7-5), 5:30 p.m. (ESPN)

TUESDAY, DEC. 31

■ Humanitarian Bowl at Boise, Idaho, \$750,000
Iowa State (7-5) vs. Boise State (11-1), Noon (ESPN)

■ Sun Bowl

At El Paso, Texas, \$1.35M
Washington (7-5) vs. Purdue (6-6), 2 p.m. (CBS)

■ Liberty Bowl at Memphis, Tenn., \$1.3M

Colorado State (10-3) vs. TCU (9-2), 3:30 p.m. (ESPN)

■ Silicon Valley Classic at San Jose, \$750,000

Fresno State (8-5) vs. Georgia Tech (7-5), 3:30 p.m. (ESPN2)

■ Peach Bowl at Atlanta, \$1.6M

Maryland (10-3) vs. Tennessee (8-4), 7:30 p.m. (ESPN)

■ San Francisco Bowl, \$800,000

Air Force (8-4) vs. Virginia Tech (9-4), 10:30 p.m. (ESPN2)

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 1

■ Outback Bowl at Tampa, Fla., \$2M
Michigan (9-3) vs. Florida (8-4), 11 a.m. (ESPN)

■ Cotton Bowl at Dallas, \$3M

LSU (8-4) vs. Texas (10-2), 11 a.m. (FOX)

■ Gator Bowl at Jacksonville, Fla., \$1.6M

Notre Dame (10-2) vs. North Carolina State (10-3), 12:30 p.m. (NBC)

■ Capital One Bowl at Orlando, Fla., \$5.125M

Penn State (9-3) vs. Auburn (8-4), 1 p.m. (ABC)

■ Rose Bowl at Pasadena, \$11-13M

Washington State (10-2) vs. Oklahoma (11-2), 5 p.m. (ABC)

■ Sugar Bowl at New Orleans, \$11-13M

Georgia (12-1) vs. Florida State (9-4), 8:30 p.m. (ABC)

THURSDAY, JAN. 2

■ Orange Bowl at Miami, \$11-13M
Southern California (10-2) vs. Iowa (11-1), 8 p.m. (ABC)

FRIDAY, JAN. 3

■ Fiesta Bowl at Tempe, Ariz., \$11-13M
Miami (12-0) vs. Ohio State (13-0), 8 p.m. (ABC)

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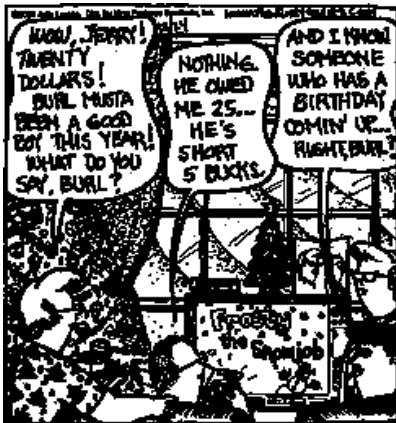
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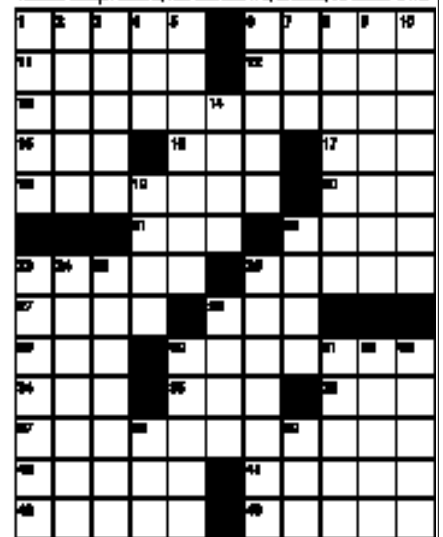
- ACROSS**
- 1 "Common Sense" author
 - 6 Command to Spot
 - 11 Annex
 - 12 Nebraska city
 - 13 "My Fair Lady" director
 - 15 Building wing
 - 16 Vitamin bottle abbr.
 - 17 Blunder
 - 18 Plunder
 - 20 — oh!
 - 21 Superlative suffix
 - 22 Soccer legend
 - 23 Black-heads
 - 25 Big mistake
 - 27 Put — out
 - 28 Stale stuff
 - 29 Droop
 - 30 Alan of "Die Hard"
 - 34 Pub pint
 - 35 Gorm-molion
 - 36 Gorilla, e.g.
 - 37 "Star Wars" director
 - 40 Bert's pal
 - 41 Lipa neon
 - 42 Gablet parts
 - 43 Prices
- DOWN**
- 1 Called to the phone
 - 2 Fred Astaire's sister
 - 3 Objects of adulation
 - 4 Neither follower
 - 5 Absorb
 - 6 Kind of point or length
 - 7 Earthen-bound bird
 - 8 Fleet
 - 9 Church song
 - 10 Cross-country runner
 - 14 Fix copy

TRAPS	ALID
RIVAL	DINAR
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LET	ESP
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ALAN	DIE
JIM	HENDRIX
ABE	OWN
MADAM	ABIAN
ABATE	TONTO
AYES	ESSEN

Yesterday's answer

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 19 Hammer part | 28 Bone — 30ls |
| 22 Chorizo base | 31 Spiked clubs |
| 23 Fox amounts | 32 Separate harness |
| 24 Ready for conflict | 33 High border |
| 25 Headline spot | 39 Numero — |

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NEWS OF THE WEIRD by Chuck Shepard

Award given for counting toilet paper

■ Ian Jewell, an employee of the West Somerset (England) District Council, was rewarded by his bosses after his counting revealed that the toilet paper in the restrooms contained fewer than the 320 sheets per roll stated in the supplier's contract (September).

■ A popular pastime in Bismarck, N.D. (according to an October Associated Press report), is a game called "Slip," in which teenagers walk the city during summer nights trying to avoid cars' headlights. (If they get flashed, they're out.) Said one teenage girl, "It's better than sitting around on the couch on a Friday night watching a movie."

■ In many cities, the opening of a Krispy Kreme doughnut shop has been marked by fans queuing up several hours in advance, but Peter Bolland and his son, P.J. (both grown men), lined up 30 hours early for the store's debut in Kitchener, Ontario, in November. ("This sounds so ridiculous," said P.J.)





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SANTA MONICA SCENE °CALENDAR EDITION

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2002

TODAY

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.

Ongoing support groups for people 55 and older. Current openings in, So, What Are You Going to Do With the Rest of your Life? Tuesdays, 10:00 to 11:30am. Center for Healthy Aging, 2125 Arizona Avenue. Sliding scale fee. Not drop-in groups. Phone interview required. Call Information and Referral. (310)576-2550.

BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUPS AT SMC'S EMERITUS COLLEGE. Santa Monica College offers free bereavement support groups in the summer session through it's Emeritus College, a widely praised program designed for older adults. Two support groups will meet Tuesdays on an ongoing basis. One group will meet from noon to 1:50 p.m. and the other from 7 p.m. to 8:50 p.m. For information and registration, call Emeritus College

at (310) 434-4306.

Crossroads Schools in Santa Monica invites local musicians (grades 3-7) to join orchestra rehearsals. Rehearsals are ongoing and are held each Tuesday of the school year, from 3:15 to 4:15. Students may join at anytime. Cost is free, students must bring their own instruments. 1714 21st Street, SM. For more information please call (310)829-7391

Santa Monica College Emeritus College Band invites adult musicians who play a band instrument to join the band. Rehearsals are held each Tuesday evening in the Band room at Lincoln Middle School, 14th and California Streets from 7pm to 9:15pm. Concerts are given during the year. For more information call (310)474-5271.

CHRISTMAS

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.

KEEP YOUR DATE STRAIGHT

Promote your event in the Santa Monica Daily Press Calendar section.

Fax all information to our Calendar Editor: Attention Angela @ 310.576.9913

MOVIE °GUIDE

LOEWS CINIPLEX BROADWAY CINEMA

1441 Third St. at Broadway
Empire (2002) (R) 3:00, 10:30. **About Schmidt** (R) 12:15, 1:15, 3:15, 4:15, 6:15, 7:15, 9:15, 10:15
Two Weeks Notice (PG-13) 11:30, 12:30, 2:00, 4:30, 5:30, 7:00, 8:00, 9:30.

MANN CRITERION

1313 Third St.
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (PG) 11:30, 3:15, 7:05, 10:30. **Adaptation** (R) 12:30, 3:45, 7:10, 10:20. **Treasure Planet** (PG) 12:00. **The Hot Chick** (PG-13) 2:30, 5:00, 7:45, 10:10, 12:35. **Gangs of New York** (R) 11:15, 3:00, 7:00, 10:40. **Narc** (R) 11:00, 1:45, 4:30, 7:15, 10:00, 12:30. **The Wild Thornberrys Movie** (PG) 11:45, 2:15, 4:45, 7:30, 9:50.

AMC THEATRE SM 7

1310 3rd Street
Analyze That (R) 11:35, 1:50, 4:30, 7:15, 9:45.
Die Another Day (PG-13) 10:25, 1:20, 4:25, 7:30, 10:35. **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, 10:40. **Star Trek: Nemesis** with **Captions** (PG-13) 11:15, 2:00, 4:50, 7:40, 10:30. **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, 7:00, 9:30.

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

Billy Mays enjoys the fruits of hawking Orange Clean

BY MITCH STACY

Associated Press Writer

PALM HARBOR, Fla. — There's no escaping Billy Mays on TV.

There he is on one commercial, urging you to add a scoop of OxiClean to each laundry load. Turn the channel and he is selling a car dent fixer, or a hands-free cell phone device. On another, he is spritzing Orange Clean on a kitchen counter.

The burly, bearded pitchman doesn't just tout products on the tube — he loves his work so much that he gave bottles of OxiClean to the 300 guests at his wedding, and did his spiel ("Powered by the air we breathe!") right there on the dance floor. Visitors to his house get bottles of cleaner and housekeeping tips.

"I enjoy what I do," the Pittsburgh native said, and, chuckling at the memory of his wedding, added, "I think it shows."

Mays, 44, has helped make Orange Glo International, maker of OxiClean, Kaboom and Orange Clean, one of the nation's fastest-growing companies. And he has landed a big house with a pool in the back and a Bentley in the garage.

His ubiquitousness and his exuberant, thumbs-up pitches have won Mays plenty of fans. People line up at his personal appearances for autographed color glossies, and strangers stop him in airports to chat about the products. One of his commercials plays during a scene in the Angelina Jolie movie "Life or Something Like It."

But he also has his detractors. In a true measure of celebrity in the modern age, whole Web sites are now dedicated to

trashing him.

"The mute button on my remote is getting worn out from all the times I have to deal with him invading my television," one posting says, summing up the sentiments of many visitors to a site called "Billy Mays Mayhem."

"This guy has the most disgusting sales pitch on TV," says another.

Surprisingly soft-spoken in conversation, Mays claims he has just recently learned of his Internet presence and has not looked at the sites. He seems kind of embarrassed by any attention not related to the products.

"I'm a sensitive guy," he said. "I don't want to be brought down, so I just leave it

at that. As long as there's good and bad, it evens itself out."

Mays has never been anything but a salesman, starting out of high school with his dad's waste hauling business.

He developed his style demonstrating knives, mops and other "as seen on TV" gadgets on the Atlantic City, N.J., boardwalk. For years he worked on the state fair and home show circuits, attracting crowds with his booming voice and genial manner.

After meeting Orange Glo International founder Max Appel at a home show in Pittsburgh in the mid-1990s, Mays was recruited to demonstrate the environmentally friendly line of cleaning products on the St. Petersburg-based

Home Shopping Network (where he also met his wife, Deborah). Sales took off the very first day he was on.

Commercials and infomercials followed, anchored by the high-energy Mays showing how it is done while tossing out phrases like, "Long live your laundry!"

Now he is the public face of a company projected to earn \$330 million this year, after taking in \$245 million in 2001.

Inc. magazine named Denver-based Orange Glo International one of the 10 fastest-growing privately owned companies in each of the past three years. Appel said Mays is a big part of the company's success.

"He's grateful for where he is, and he's a true performer," Appel said.

Prison officials ban popular inmate wine

By The Associated Press

LANCASTER — Officials at one state prison are hoping to make a crude cellblock wine as rare as a 1945 Chateau Latour Bordeaux.

Prisoners make the wine, known as pruno, from a variety of haphazard ingredients that could include moldy peaches and even ketchup.

But pruno also has been blamed for violence at the California State Prison, Los Angeles County. As a result, officials decided in October to remove all fresh fruit from boxed lunches, which are delivered daily to the cells of its 4,000 inmates.

"With a lot of our serious incidents, the inmates are drunk," said Lt. Ron Nipper, a prison spokesman. "We've got to put a

serious damper on making alcohol."

In the first nine months of the year, there were 102 assaults on staff and 122 inmate-on-inmate violent incidents reported at the prison, which sits in the Mojave Desert about 40 miles northeast of Los Angeles.

Prison officials acknowledged it will be difficult to stop pruno production entirely. The basic recipes are simple and require only a rudimentary knowledge of the fermentation process, in which sugars are broken down into ethyl alcohol and carbon dioxide in the presence of yeast.

Prisoners will still receive fruit during breakfast and dinner, which are both served in cafeterias. Under state guidelines, prisoners must receive 15 servings of fresh fruit each week.

Corrections officials are considering whether to implement the fresh fruit lunch ban statewide. Prisons already are prohibited from serving three popular pruno ingredients: oranges, raisins and sugar packets. But a state report has found creative prisoners can make pruno from yams, flavored gelatin, honey and hard candies.

Frustrated prison officials said they can't ban everything.

"Some institutions have tried, and they've found that about the only thing they can serve is meat," said Russ Heimerich, a California Department of Corrections spokesman. "You can make (pruno) out of ketchup. Some inmates were even using the frosting off of cakes. It's pretty much an unwinnable battle."

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Weekend Breakfast
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HAPPY HOUR
From 4:00pm to 6:00pm
Includes: \$4.99 Draft Beer, \$3.99 Wine, \$2.99 Appetizers

JAZZ NIGHT
Every Tuesday
From 7:00pm to 10:00pm
Includes: Live Jazz, \$5.00 Drink, \$3.00 Appetizer

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All day long! Includes: Pancakes, Eggs, Bacon, Hash Browns, Fruit, Coffee

2 One FREE Bar Appetizer
All day long! Includes: \$4.99 Draft Beer, \$3.99 Wine, \$2.99 Appetizers

3 One FREE Dessert on Jazz Night
Every Tuesday! Includes: Live Jazz, \$5.00 Drink, \$3.00 Appetizer

1333 Main Ave. Santa Monica, CA 90401-3333

It was the day before Christmas

and me full of worry, because I had to find the perfect gift in a hurry. The stockings were hung on brass holders with care, in hopes that Paykel had that one gift with flare. I know they have handmade novelty gifts, they even have that cast iron doornut for my cousin Cliff.

They doors flung open as I was running out of time, but of course Paykel had the perfect, wind chimes. They also have yummy jams and "hot" jellies, and even the gift that would make you holler "Whoo oolly!"

The owner, a jolly man himself, wrapped up my gifts, the last from the shelf. With a twinkle in his eye he sent me on my way, and wished me and mine a very happy holiday.

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