WEEKEND EDITION

Santa Monica Daily Press

December 24-25, 2005 | A newspaper with issues | Volume 5, Issue 36

DAILY LOTTERY

SUPER LOTTO
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NEWS OF THE WEIRD
BY CHUCK SHEPARD

■ Police in Fairfax County, Va., discovered, as one of their only clues in an October rape, a hockey puck from a junior league team in Wichita Falls, Texas, apparently accidentally dropped by the assailant. Said an officer, "It's the first time I'm aware of that a hockey puck has ever been left at a crime scene." (2) Also in October, a surveillance camera at Sonny's Pizza & Pasta in San Clemente, Calif., showed a burglar entering, pocketing cash, and then stopping to make himself a large pepperoni pizza from scratch (before being surprised by an early-shift worker and fleeing).

■ The bane of all fair-minded office sports teams is the "ringer," the superathlete from outside who is imported to help the office team win. Former minor league baseball player Mark Guerra, 33, was accused by Florida authorities of being such a ringer, imported for the Apalachee Correctional Institution's team, which he led to victory in a Department of Corrections softball tournament. The Florida Department of Law Enforcement arrested Guerra in October and charged him with fraudulently accepting a $1,247 "salary" as a temporary Apalachee "employee" (but never actually doing any work).

TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is the 358th day of 2005. There are seven days left in the year.

One hundred years ago, on Dec. 24, 1905, future billionaire, aviator and moviemaker Howard Hughes was born in Texas.
In 1814, the War of 1812 officially ended as the United States and Britain signed the Treaty of Ghent in Belgium.

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Schools urged to bone up on art

BY RYAN HYATT
Daily Press Staff Writer

CITYWIDE — Supporters of a county art plan say the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District only needs to contribute 2 percent more of its budget to create a permanent arts education for all K-12 students.

The SMMUSD earmarked $3.5 million this year — 3.4 percent of its general operating budget — toward arts education.

However, the Los Angeles Arts Commission — the group which organized Arts for All, the 10-year plan to bring all K-12 students in the county an arts education — say that if the SMMUSD kicked in another $2.5 million of its budget, it would ensure all local students receive an arts curriculum from the time they enter kindergarten until the time they graduate.

"We want to go from making our arts program good to making it great," said Tom Whaley, the district's art coordinator.

Currently, the district's arts programs benefit from: an education foundation; parent-teacher organizations that raise money to supplement state funding; a 2003 voter-approved parcel tax for schools; and contributions from both the cities of Santa Monica and Malibu.

Santa Monica High School has five orchestras — one of which played at New York's Carnegie Hall in 2002 — six choral groups, several bands, advanced placement art classes and an art gallery

See ARTS FOR ALL, page 11

Santa's guiding light



Fabian Lewkowicz/Daily Press

A home in the Sunset Park area has decked the halls in preparation for the holidays. Christmas lights abound throughout the city, attracting the attention of passersby and commuters alike.

As the day is short



Fabian Lewkowicz/Daily Press

Children seemingly flee the dwindling daylight along Santa Monica Beach on Wednesday, which was Winter Solstice — the shortest day of the year.

NATIONAL

Oh deer: Look-a-like Santa dines on Vixen

BY RACHEL D'ORO
Associated Press Writer

FAIRBANKS, Alaska — He has a long, wiry beard, wears a red parka and hangs out with reindeer just a short sleigh ride from the interior Alaska town of North Pole.

But please don't confuse animal researcher Milan Shipka with you-know-who.

"I have nothing against Santa Claus. I love Christmas," Shipka said. "But reindeer meat is healthy and it tastes good, and most people don't think of Santa eating his reindeer when he's done on the 26th."

See LOOK-A-LIKE, page 10



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Santa Monica Daily Press



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)
★★★★ Express your strength mentally and emotionally. Take an overview. Touch the spiritual quality of this holiday. Don't forget to call important people at a distance. You might be mesmerized by the magical quality of a friend. Tonight: A dream can come true.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
★★★ With Venus, your ruler, going retrograde today, you could be out of sorts or overwhelmed. Ask for help from a dear friend or loved one. He or she can make quite a difference. The Bull doesn't always have to be tough. Tonight: Find your favorite spot.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20)
★★★★★ The flirtatious and romantic Gemini emerges. Some might find a child to be a bit touchy, and/or a special relationship could be askew. Let others share their feelings. Detach and walk in others' shoes. Tonight: Add music.

CANCER (June 21-July 22)
★★★★ Start adding the finishing touches to a meal or to decorations, or add a gift or two under the tree. You might find a loved one or family member very happy. Add music or go caroling. Tonight: Your home truly is your castle.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)
★★★★★ Make that extra effort to see everyone you want to today. A child or loved one is delighted by your attentiveness, especially if you take him or her along as you spread cheer. You might have your rose-colored glasses on. What a perfect day to put someone on a pedestal. Tonight: Hang out.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)
★★★ You could worry about gifts and expenses — don't. At this point, you really cannot change anything. A nurturing back or foot rub could mean a lot to someone close. Use your imagination. Tonight: Don't stray far from home.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)
★★★★★ The Moon in your sign highlights you. Happiness appears to be your middle name. Flow with the moment. You have a special way of communicating that melts a loved one's heart. He or she knows how to put sparkles in your eyes. Tonight: Find mistletoe.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)
★★ You might vanish with a special friend. How you feel about this person lights you up. You prefer to keep this special bond private. Someone in the family might have a surprise or is hiding something. Tonight: Vanish when you can.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)
★★★★★ Your actions or what you say delights friends and those around you. A neighbor or sibling might be holding back. You aren't seeing this person clearly, and you might not care. Tonight: You feel fulfilled with those around you.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)
★★★★ You might be overwhelmed by everything that you need to get done. Be careful with money. You could lose your wallet or miscount your change. Last-minute expenses could be higher than you'd anticipated. Tonight: Dote on older family members and friends.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)
★★★★★ You add a special touch wherever you are. Friends seek you out with a special message or token of affection. Don't forget someone at a distance. Think positively about others. Take the high road. Tonight: Put on a favorite piece of music to set the mood.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)
★★★★★ Someone has special plans for you. You can't get around it, and you don't want to either. Let this person add magic to the holiday. A parent or authority figure is looking for you. Make a call and let this person know that you are thinking of him or her. Tonight: You don't even need mistletoe.

CIRCULATION VERIFICATION COUNCIL AUDIT PENDING

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LOCAL

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Help you help yourself

By Daily Press staff

If you have a problem sticking to a New Year's resolution, you may need some self help.

The Self-Help And Recovery Exchange (SHARE) — the self-help clearinghouse for Los Angeles County — can help.

"People who attend self-help support groups have a 40 percent greater chance of keeping their New Year's resolutions than those who go it alone," says Ruth Hollman, founder and executive director of the center.

"Whether it's losing weight, quitting smoking, or improving your finances," said Hollman, "studies show that the best way to change your behavior is to join a self-help support group." Hollman recently returned from Stockholm, where she was the keynote speaker at Sweden's annual self-help support group conference.

Support groups have helped everyone from heart patients to people dealing with credit card debt to individuals looking for jobs.

No matter what the New Year's resolution or problem may be, SHARE has a group, among the 500 already existing groups, that will suit individual needs in multiple neighborhoods. Problems already being addressed are anger, sleeplessness, panic attacks, death, loneliness, teen issues, relationships, divorce, money and family issues. If they don't have the right group for a specific problem, SHARE can help start a new one that does.

In March 2005, Los Angeles county contracted with SHARE to expand its program, because of the success the center in Mar Vista has had in turning people's lives around, company officials said.

During national self-help support group week, Jan. 2 to Jan. 8, self-help meetings across the country are welcoming newcomers. SHARE will host an open house at their center at 5521 Grosvenor Blvd., near Centinela and Jefferson. The public is invited to visit, sign up for a free orientation and sit in on one or more of the ongoing self-help or recovery group meetings.

The center helps more than 30,000 men, women and children each year to cope with physical ailments, addiction, emotional problems and life's crises through referral to more than 10,000 self-help support groups throughout LA County. All of their services are available to everyone, anonymously and free. To find a group in a specific neighborhood call toll free at 1-877-SHARE-49.

SNOW AND SURF REPORTS

CONDITIONS

DATA PROVIDED BY ONTHESNOW.COM

BEAR MOUNTAIN

NEW SNOW (24 Hrs)	BASE DEPTH	LIFT HOURS	RUNS OPEN	LIFTS OPEN
0"	12"-12"	8:30am - 4:00pm	3	4

CONDITIONS: Packed Powder, Machine Made, Machine Groomed

JUNE MOUNTAIN

NEW SNOW (24 Hrs)	BASE DEPTH	LIFT HOURS	RUNS OPEN	LIFTS OPEN
0"	12"-24"	8:30am - 4:00pm	35	4

CONDITIONS: Packed Powder, Machine Groomed, Obstacles

MAMMOTH MOUNTAIN

NEW SNOW (24 Hrs)	BASE DEPTH	LIFT HOURS	RUNS OPEN	LIFTS OPEN
0"	24"-36"	8:30 am - 10:00 pm	150	21

CONDITIONS: Packed Powder, Machine Groomed, Obstacles

MOUNTAIN HIGH

NEW SNOW (24 Hrs)	BASE DEPTH	LIFT HOURS	RUNS OPEN	LIFTS OPEN
0"	12"-12"	8:30 am - 10:00 pm	11	6

CONDITIONS: Machine Made, Hard Packed

MT. BALDY

NEW SNOW (24 Hrs)	BASE DEPTH	LIFT HOURS	RUNS OPEN	LIFTS OPEN
0"	0"-1"	8:30 am - 4:00 pm	0	0

CONDITIONS: N/A

SNOW SUMMIT

NEW SNOW (24 Hrs)	BASE DEPTH	LIFT HOURS	RUNS OPEN	LIFTS OPEN
0"	12"-12"	N/A	8	7

CONDITIONS: Packed Powder, Machine Made, Machine Groomed

SNOW VALLEY

NEW SNOW (24 Hrs)	BASE DEPTH	LIFT HOURS	RUNS OPEN	LIFTS OPEN
0"	12"-12"	8:30 am - 4:00 pm	5	5

CONDITIONS: Packed Powder, Machine Made, Machine Groomed, Hard Packed

CONDITIONS WATER TEMP: 60°

DATA PROVIDED BY WETSAND.COM

SWELL FORECAST (4-9FT)

Significant WNW swell hits NCal on Christmas, day after for SoCal...

More significant NW swells on tap next week...

LONG RANGE SYNOPSIS

Saturday is looking like the smallest day in the forecast with size dipping to chest to head high, but with some pluses at standout west facing breaks running a couple feet overhead.

TIDE FORECAST FOR SANTA MONICA

SATURDAY				
LOW TIDE:	11:03PM	2.0FT	9:38PM	1.7FT
HIGH TIDE:	4:15AM	4.4FT	4:06PM	3.0FT
SUNDAY				
LOW TIDE:	11:56PM	1.3FT	10:23PM	2.0FT
HIGH TIDE:	4:45AM	4.8FT	5:38PM	3.0FT
MONDAY				
LOW TIDE:	12:39PM	0.5FT	11:08PM	2.2FT
HIGH TIDE:	5:17AM	5.2FT	6:48PM	3.1FT
TUESDAY				
LOW TIDE:	1:17PM	-0.1FT	11:53PM	2.3FT
HIGHTIDE:	5:50AM	5.7FT	7:42PM	3.3FT
WEDNESDAY				
LOW TIDE:	12:56PM	-0.7FT	N/A	N/A
HIGH TIDE:	6:27AM	6.1FT	8:28PM	3.5FT
THURSDAY				
LOW TIDE:	12:38AM	2.3FT	2:36PM	-1.2FT
HIGH TIDE:	7:07AM	6.5FT	9:11PM	3.6FT
FRIDAY				
LOW TIDE:	1:02AM	1.7FT	3:04PM	-0.9FT
HIGH TIDE:	7:39AM	5.9FT	9:40PM	3.1FT

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The Q Line

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THE Q-LINE RESPONSES ARE IN!

WE HAVE THE QUESTIONS.
YOU HAVE THE ANSWERS.
CHECK OUT THIS WEEK'S Q-LINE RESPONSES ON PAGE 4.

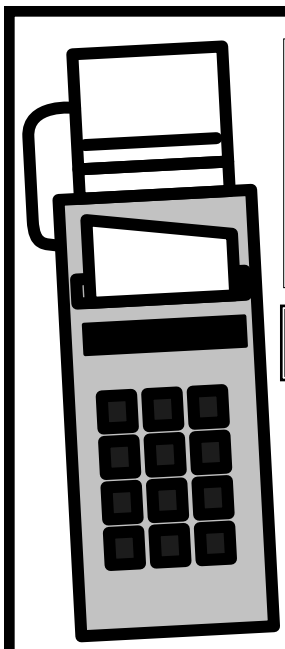
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OPINION

The Q Line

These Are A Few Of Our Favorite Things

This past week, Q-line asked:
"What are you grateful for this holiday season?"
Here are your responses:

✆ "I am grateful for my wonderful family and friends and the strength and comfort of religious heritage. At the same time, I am saddened to see the world around us making it so hard for my loved ones to cope in a dangerous, godless, callous, greedy, duplicitous environment. Selfishness and self-centeredness have taken over and are bringing ruin to our world."

✆ "Being a resident of a convalescent home here in Santa Monica, I am grateful for the fact that I'm much better this year and I can go out and about, go to the farmers' market in downtown Santa Monica and give money to needy people. So that's what I'm thankful for."

✆ "There are five things I'm grateful for: my wife, my wife, my wife, my wife, and lastly, my wife."

✆ "Well, considering the quality of idiots in Washington D.C., Sacramento, and City Hall, there's not much to be grateful for in government. But at least I am grateful for the fact "The Simpsons" are still going strong and every week they manage to pull out some new, silly episode even when you think they can't. At least when Homer Simpson does something stupid it doesn't cost a lot of lives like when Bush does something stupid."

✆ "I am grateful that Santa Monica is not yet like Los Angeles. I am grateful that only half the bums from Los Angeles actually stay here. I am grateful that Heal the Bay after 20 years still lets us swim in the Pacific Ocean. I am grateful that there aren't more gang members having counseling jobs at the Pico Family & Youth Center. I am grateful that police officers are involved with the youths at PAL. I am grateful there are only 2,000 units of low-income housing. I am grateful that the city requires 120 hours of community service to obtain home ownership loans. I am grateful that all the non-profits in this town have a taxpayer subsidized feeding trough at City Hall so they can make a living. I am grateful that we don't have a video camera on every corner. I am grateful that I can still drive a car in Santa Monica and not ride a horse. I am grateful that next year we can vote in some decent commonsense leadership. I am grateful to pay only $30 a year to park my car in front of my own house. But most of all I am most grateful that I can still say to the City Council, 'Merry Christmas and may God still bless you even in your unperceived ignorance."

✆ "I am grateful for Santa Monica Airport, truly a crown jewel in a sea of gridlock. I am grateful to have a fine and open aviation facility instead of a mega-development in my neighborhood. I am grateful to live within walking distance of Santa Monica Airport. I am grateful for the economic and business benefits brought into the westside community which make Santa Monica Airport a bustling hub of commerce. I am grateful for fine people, businesses and staff whose jobs and livelihood depend on the airport. I am grateful that Santa Monica Airport represents the only transportation mode entirely free of traffic gridlock on the westside. I am grateful for Angel Flight who volunteer medical assistance flights and for the EVAC (Emergency Volunteer Air Corps) group who stand ready to provide flights for vital emergency personnel to use Santa Monica Airport. I am grateful to see a young generation of flight students at Santa Monica Airport who make the financial sacrifice and undergo the rigorous training necessary to use Santa Monica Airport. I am grateful for years of camaraderie, brotherhood/sisterhood of those who fly at Santa Monica Airport. May thy windsock forever wave in the presence of thine adversaries."

✆ "I am grateful that our president, George W. Bush, has no sons."

✆ "The first thing that came to mind is keeping fluoride out of our city water supply. This has been a three-year plus struggle to keep this poison out of our waters and I am very grateful that we have been able to do this so far. Also, I'd be very grateful if the campaign to halt nationwide fluoridation does come to pass and we will be able to eliminate all fluoridation throughout the country."

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 editor@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.

Eavesdropping is more than just bad manners



MODERN TIMES
BY LLOYD GARVER

The President of the United States has enormous powers. During wartime, he has even greater powers, as he should. But he doesn't have "unlimited powers." Countries in which the rulers have unlimited powers are known as dictatorships, and those are the kinds of governments that we are supposedly against. So, when I heard the president use as an excuse for eavesdropping on U.S. citizens the fact that he just felt it was necessary, it didn't seem like a good enough reason. We already have a system in which there is a special court set up to issue secret warrants for this purpose. These warrants can be granted quickly, and are rarely turned down. If time is of the essence, the president can even get these warrants after the fact. The only thing is, if you get a warrant, there will be a record of whom you have eavesdropped on.

This warrant system came about after the Vietnam War when it was discovered that the Federal Government had been spying on people whose positions on the war were different from the Administration's, and on people the government just didn't like. One of the presidents involved in these tapings was Richard Nixon, and he had an infamous "enemies list," and he felt he had a right to spy on whomever he wanted. As I recall, Mr. Nixon got into a lot of trouble.

A few days after it was revealed that the government was secretly spying on U.S. citizens without warrants, President Bush used words like "inexcusable" and "shameful." I was happily surprised that he took this position, but when I read closer, I saw that he was saying that what was "inexcusable" and "shameful" was the media's telling the American people that this spying was going on.

The problem with all this secret taping is that once it gets started, it can get out of control. Since all of this is so secretive, how are we — or Congress — to know who's listening in on what conversations?

And sure enough, a transcript of a phone call was given to me by a fictitious, yet unreliable, source. It deals with the president getting advice on the domestic spying issue from one of his closest advisors:

HARRIET MIERS: Hello.
PRESIDENT BUSH: Hello, Harriet. It's the president.

LONG PAUSE

PRESIDENT BUSH: Can you hear me all right?
HARRIET MIERS: I hear you just fine. I'm still a little peeved at you, that's all. Bailing before they even held hearings on me.
PRESIDENT BUSH: Harriet, I told you that was because of pressure from the Far Right Wackos. Now, I really need your advice.
HARRIET MIERS: Why don't you call those "Far Right Wackos" for advice if you care about them so much? Or do what you think is best. After all, "aren't you the smartest man" I ever met?
PRESIDENT BUSH: Look, I really need some help on this domestic spying thing.
HARRIET MIERS: Well, if you had called me first, I would have told you to get warrants. Now, let's see. Have you played the "stopping this will help the enemy" angle yet?
PRESIDENT BUSH: Yep, first thing.
HARRIET MIERS: Good. Have you attacked the media for revealing what you shouldn't have done?
PRESIDENT BUSH: Almost immediately. I'm also thinking of raising the threat level to the next color to prove that extraordinary means are necessary at this time.
HARRIET MIERS: I wouldn't. Nobody pays attention to that anymore. I'll bet even you couldn't tell me what color we're on today.
PRESIDENT BUSH: Orange? No, yellow? I guess you're right. Well, what should I do?
HARRIET MIERS: Relax. The worst that could happen is that this thing will go to the Supreme Court to decide what powers you have.
PRESIDENT BUSH: The Supreme Court? Ha! I guess we know how they'll decide. So, I have nothing to worry about.
HARRIET MIERS: Only your conscience bothering you for selling out an old friend. I could've been one of those Justices who would grant you this outrageous power.
PRESIDENT BUSH: Listen, I gotta go. I'm late for my bike ride.

CLICK. PRESIDENT HANGS UP

HARRIET MIERS: Did you get all that?
HILLARY CLINTON: Every word, Harriet.
HARRIET MIERS: You won't forget me?
HILLARY CLINTON: Not a chance.
HARRIET MIERS: And you know what size black robe I wear, right?
HILLARY CLINTON: Uh, right.

(Lloyd Garver has written for many television shows, ranging from "Sesame Street" to "Family Ties" to "Frasier." He also has read many books, some of them in hardcover. He writes the "Modern Times" column for CBSnews.com's opinion page and a weekly column for SportsLine.com. He can be reached at smdp@lloydgarvermoderntimes.com.)



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STATE

Vintner has spirited recovery after blaze

BY MICHELLE LOCKE
Associated Press Writer

ST. HELENA, Calif. — After a warehouse fire wiped out huge chunks of his wine inventory this fall, vintner Ted Hall took stock. On hand was new wine that would take months to mature and a pile of "pomace," grape skins and seeds left over from harvest.

Which is when he hit on Plan B: Make grappa, the potent after-dinner drink made from distilling pomace.

"We're making lemonade out of lemons," Hall said with a wry smile.

Normally, the pomace would have become fertilizer for Hall's organic Long Meadow Ranch in the Napa Valley, which also sells extra-virgin olive oil and grass-fed beef.

Turning the pomace into grappa made for a higher-profile product that can help keep the Long Meadow name in front of restaurants and other customers during the wait for new releases, crucial for the fast-moving, short-memoried wine business.

"The real issue is maintaining relationships and awareness of who we are," said Hall.

Long Meadow lost its 2001 and 2002 cabernet sauvignon, which would have been the current and upcoming releases, when fire broke out in October at Wines Central in Vallejo, a storage facility at the old Navy shipyard on Mare Island just south of Napa. Also gone was the 2002 sangiovese, a red grape varietal, the 2003 Ranch House Red, a blend, and the entire "library" collection — a selection of wines saved from previous years — going back to the first vintage of 1994.

The losses — Hall didn't want to give a figure but said they amounted to three years' worth of sales — could have been worse.

More than 70 wineries had wine in the warehouse and total losses have been estimated as high as $100 million. Officials ruled the fire arson, but have made no arrests.

Long Meadow had insurance and, in a stroke of what Hall calls "just dumb luck," the winery had scheduled a late date for bottling the 2003 wine still in barrels at the winery, so that vintage is safe. The winery will release its 2003 sangiovese in March, along with a sauvignon blanc, and the 2003 cabernet in September.

Still, the fire left a gap, one that is being experienced by a number of other wineries that lost substantial inventory.

"The problem is you've basically got to start over. Because if you're on a wine list, or you're on a shelf and you can't supply, you lose your placement," said Mike Fisher, a partner in the wine consultancy Global Wine Partners, based in the Napa Valley.

Other strategies being adopted by fire-affected wineries include trying to stretch out what wine is left or moving up release dates, he said.

At Long Meadow, Hall plans on making about 50 cases of grappa, which will probably be priced at about $35 for a 375 milliliter bottle and could be available by June.

Hall is a veteran of the wine industry and served as executive chairman of The Robert Mondavi Corp. for most of 2004, until it was sold to Constellation Brands.

Although it's often found in tall, elegant bottles, grappa has a bit of a reputation as a tonsil-toasting brew. But in recent years, high-end makers have been adopting changes, such as using fresh pomace from just one type of grape, to produce a much more polished product. That's the style Long Meadow's after, and early tastings indicate the grappa should reflect the cabernet character of its origins, said Hall.

Grappa is a small part of the spirits market, but it is becoming more popular as customers have warmed up to the habit of serving a digestive spirit after dinner, said Gary Marcaletti, owner of the specialty San Francisco Wine Trading Co.

"I think it's becoming a little more prominent. We carry 25 to 30 grappas so that gives you some idea," he said.

At up to 100 proof, grappa packs a punch and is definitely for sipping, not slurping. Hall tells the story of how a neighbor earned the nickname "Papa Grappa" after overindulging at a backyard get-together on a Saturday night. The next morning, the neighbor was missing at early Mass because, his wife explained, "After the party, he crawled up on the dining room table to sleep ... and he's still there!"

Traditionally, grappa's been thought of as a way to ease your worries. Hall's not expecting miracles from his new spirit. But he does hope it dilutes the sour taste of the fire losses.

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4:15 p.m ✛ Christmas Eve Mass ✛ Church
6:15 p.m ✛ Christmas Eve Mass ✛ Church
9:00 p.m ✛ Christmas Eve Mass ✛ Church

MIDNIGHT MASS

12:00 a.m. ✛ Midnight Mass ✛ Gymnasium
12:00 a.m. ✛ Midnight Mass ✛ Church

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STATE

STATE BRIEFS

By land or by sea, the boat show must go on

By The Associated Press

CHINO HILLS — Thirty miles inland from Orange County yacht harbors, boaters are again celebrating the holidays at the annual Chino Hills Boat Parade through the community's roads.

Vehicles towing a variety of decorated vessels snaked their way through the land-locked city's Los Serranos neighborhood Thursday night, led by a "Rudolph the Red-Nosed RV," and the quirky procession was prepared for another run Friday night.

More than 65 boats were expected to participate in the two-day parade, which has become a beloved tradition since its inception 14 years ago.

"Every time I tell someone we're involved in the Chino Hills Boat Parade they say, `Where is the water?' But we don't need water. People love it, they line the streets," said parade organizer Ernie Kruse of the Chino Hills Kiwanis Club.

"It's pretty nice, it puts you in the merry mood," said Lidiya Tokarets, 15, of Chino Hills.

West Nile virus cases down in county

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — While cases of West Nile virus climbed statewide, infections plummeted in Los Angeles County from 309 in 2004 to just 43 this year.

This year was widely expected to be a bad one for the mosquito-borne infections, mainly due to the high number of breeding pools after record winter rains.

California saw cases rise from 779 in 2004 to 910 this year, one-third of the 2,733 cases diagnosed nationally, county health officials said Thursday. Eighteen Californians died compared with 27 last year.

None of the 2005 deaths occurred in Los Angeles County, which had 12 last year.

"What we've seen across the country is that places that have a very heavy year tend not to have a heavy year the next year," county health officer Dr. Jonathan E. Fielding said. "Nobody really knows the answer why this happens, whether it's a decline in the susceptible bird population, certainly the good job vector control does or education efforts. But I think there are factors beyond those we don't understand yet."

The virus is transmitted to people and animals through mosquito bites. About 80 percent of those who are infected have no symptoms, but in some cases people can suffer paralysis and death.

In the six years since the virus was first diagnosed in New York and spread across the country, the virus has demonstrated dramatic fluctuations in both the number of people infected and horses, birds, sentinel chickens and mosquito pools.

Fluctuations are due to changing temperatures, rainfall and humidity, bird reservoirs, mosquito populations and efforts by mosquito abatement districts to kill mosquitoes, authorities said.

Over the overlay: County wants 424 put on hold

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The county wants state regulators to delay implementation of the 424 area code overlay, saying there are still plenty of numbers left in the 310 area.

The petition filed Thursday said the state Public Utilities Commission relied on "now-obsolete data" that overstated demand and understated the supply of available numbers to "create a false impression of a number shortage that in reality does not exist."

There has been strong resistance to the area code overlay.

"I think the county makes a very compelling case and I hope the PUC will think so, too," said Jacki Bacharach, executive director of the South Bay Council of Governments.

The PUC approved the overlay that allows current telephone customers to retain their numbers after meeting vigorous opposition to splitting the 310 area code.

David Sommers, spokesman for county Supervisor Don Knabe, a key opponent of the area code overlay, hopes the new information prompts the PUC to reconsider.

"We hope the PUC will take into consideration the expert testimony the county is presenting that says current (number inventory) studies need to be done before this overlay goes into effect," he said. "We're optimistic the PUC will make a rational decision."

Animal rights activists getting catty

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The Animal Defense League-Los Angeles, alleging City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo denied them free speech rights, filed a $3 million claim against the city.

The activists have staged rowdy demonstrations near the homes of city employees in recent years in an effort to end the killing of strays by the Department of Animal Services.

Delgadillo recently announced misdemeanor conspiracy charges were filed against the Animal Defense League-Los Angeles for allegedly threatening public employees. Delgadillo's office will try to impose probation on league members to stop their protests.

Attorney John J. Uribe, representing the activist group, said that the Animal Defense League-Los Angeles didn't engage in illegal tactics and that Delgadillo was probably confusing it with the Animal Liberation Front, which has taken responsibility for vandalizing city worker property.

"It's all innuendo," Uribe said.

STATE

Christmas tree rentals trim away the guilt

BY DAN GOODIN
Associated Press Writer

SAN FRANCISCO — It might just take a Christmas miracle to deck out these spindly branches with ornaments or arrange a pile of gifts around their slender, bare trunks, but they've all been snatched up, and it's hard to argue with success.

The trees, rented out by San Franciscans for $90 each during the holiday season, are designed to give residents an environmentally friendly alternative to traditional firs and pines.

The fruitless olives, Brisbane boxes and others range from 6 to 12 feet tall and aren't quite Charlie Brown's sad sapling, but they're definitely not the full-bodied evergreens most Christmas revelers have grown accustomed to.

That's just fine by Stacy Collins Johnson, who said she rented a live primrose so her two children, ages 4 and 6, can help replant it in one of San Francisco's needy neighborhoods once the holidays have passed.

"I wasn't really sure how this would play out, having a nontraditional Christmas tree in our house," Johnson said. "I thought they'd be upset, and they love it. They named the tree Charlie Green."

Like other San Franciscans participating in the program, Johnson paid to have the tree, complete with pot and soil, delivered to her home. Her family will decorate it, celebrate Christmas, and then city officials will arrange to pick up the tree and plant it in a neighborhood in need of greenery.

As December rolls around each year, environmentally conscious residents of San Francisco are confronted with a choice: buy a real tree grown expressly to be chopped down and strung with lights or get an artificial one. Both options have their drawbacks. Environmentalists say growing real trees is a waste of valuable resources and discarding them clogs local landfills; artificial trees often contain lead and other harmful chemicals and also usually end up in dumps.

"We call it the guilt-free option," said Mark Westlund, spokesman for the San Francisco Department of Environment, which decided to introduce the program earlier this year. "You don't have to worry about cutting down a living tree and you don't have to worry about buying a tree with petroleum materials."

San Francisco created the program with help from the nonprofit group Friends of the Urban Forest, which plants trees along the city's streets. Within a week of announcing the program, all 100 trees were claimed, Westlund said.

Delivery began last week; retrieval will be during the first week of January. Officials will handle any damaged trees on a case-by-case basis and use the experience to shape their future policy, Westlund said.

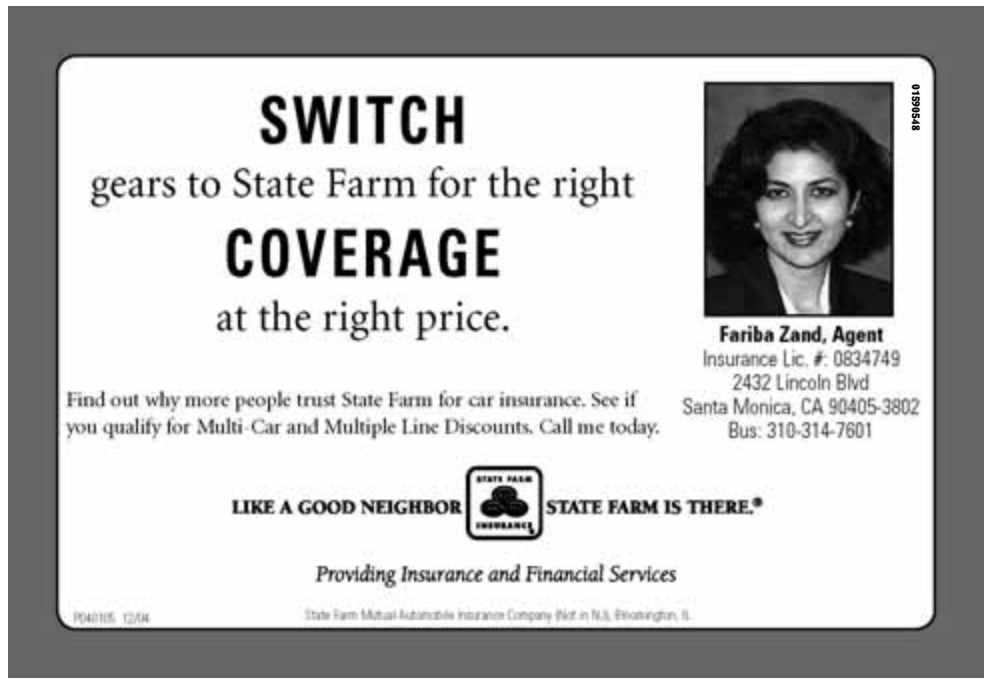
"I'm kind of an unrepentant tree hugger," said George Slack, who rented three trees for his cabinet shop. "There's something very nice about having a living piece of greenery in your living environment this time of year."

But not everyone who rents trees to be planted after Christmas fits that description, at least when it comes to those picking similar offerings elsewhere in the country.

"My customers aren't granola-eating, sandal-wearing type people," said John Fogel, owner of the Original Living Christmas Tree Co. in Portland, Ore., which has rented Christmas trees for 14 years. "It's a practical thing they do around the holidays."











NATIONAL





Starbucks is betting on appeal of joe on the go

BY ELIZABETH M. GILLESPIE
AP Business Writer

SEATTLE — Leaning out the window of her SUV, Tami Cornwell orders the same drink she gets almost every day: "Double-tall, four-pump vanilla caramel Macchiato."

A high-tech recruiter, she's gotten hooked on the growing number of drivethrus Starbucks has been opening in recent years.

"On weekends, I like to go into the store," she said one morning at a drivethru north of downtown on her way to work. "On the weekdays, it's more about convenience and caffeine."

The world's largest specialty coffee chain once shunned the drivethru concept, fearing it might alienate customers who like to come inside and sip their lattes while listening to music in cozy chairs.

In the early 1990s, as independent espresso stands were starting to gain a steady following, Starbucks stuck to its original game plan: giving people a "third place" to escape from the hustle and bustle of home and work.

Eventually, it got hard to ignore coffee lovers' demand for a quick java fix without leaving the warmth of their driver's seats.

"We have a habit of giving customers what they want, and when a customer has six kids in their car or their favorite pets and it's raining or snowing, that's creating an experience for them that will want to make them use a drivethru," said Jim Donald, Starbucks' president and chief executive.

Starbucks started testing out the market in 1994, opening its first drivethrus in car-crazed Southern California. It had dozens of drivethrus doing brisk business within a few years.

There were 170 and counting by 2001. It opened 354 drivethrus in the U.S. during its latest fiscal year, pushing its nationwide total to 1,065 — nearly 15 percent of its roughly 7,300 domestic stores.

The 2005 fiscal year, which ended Oct. 2, marked the first time drivethrus comprised more than half of Starbucks' new company-operated stores — those that aren't licensed in airports, hotels, grocery stores and the like.

The company now has drivethrus in every state but Vermont and Wyoming. Internationally, Canada has 35 drivethrus, there are nine in Japan, four in Mexico, and one each in Puerto Rico and Indonesia.

Drivethrus will continue to add to Starbucks' bottom line, making up about half of the new stores the company opens domestically over the next few years, Donald said.

Aside from the headset-wearing baristas, the ambiance in many of its drivethrus reveals the same attention to decor the company gives its traditional stores, with cushy chairs and art on the walls.

Bruce Milletto, president of Bellissimo Coffee InfoGroup in Portland, Ore., said he's surprised it took so long for Starbucks to get into the drivethru business.

His consulting firm has helped thousands of small businesses open coffee shops and drivethrus over the past 15 years, he said.

He's gotten used to hearing clients sneer at Starbucks, denouncing the company as a corporate giant that's bound to try to put them out of business. He tries to convince them it's not such a David-vs.-Goliath thing.

"Starbucks is oftentimes, to the small independent coffee entrepreneur, thought of as the devil to the industry. What most people don't realize, is that without Starbucks, the industry wouldn't have exploded as it has," Milletto said.

Espresso drivethrus dot so many parking lots and street corners in Seattle and its surrounding suburbs that some have difficulty surviving.

"You get customers by stealing from other drivethrus," said Mark Weber, owner of Scooter's Espresso in the city's Pinehurst neighborhood. "You're not creating new customers."

Weber gets enough morning rush-hour customers to be breaking even after about five months in operation. He's tried to drum up new business by offering 20 percent off coffee drinks from noon to closing time, but hasn't gotten much of a response.

As he sees it, Starbucks' growing drivethru presence is making it harder on independents.

"They take away a lot of business away from the small operations," he said. "They were the only game in town for years, so they've built up their market share. ... They're masters at marketing, no doubt about it."

Critics have long derided Starbucks as the McDonald's of coffee. Now some chuckle that drivethrus just make them look more like it.

Donald bristles at such a suggestion: "We are not the McDonald's of anything," he said. "The drivethru is another convenience for our customers as we want them to enjoy a great cup of coffee."





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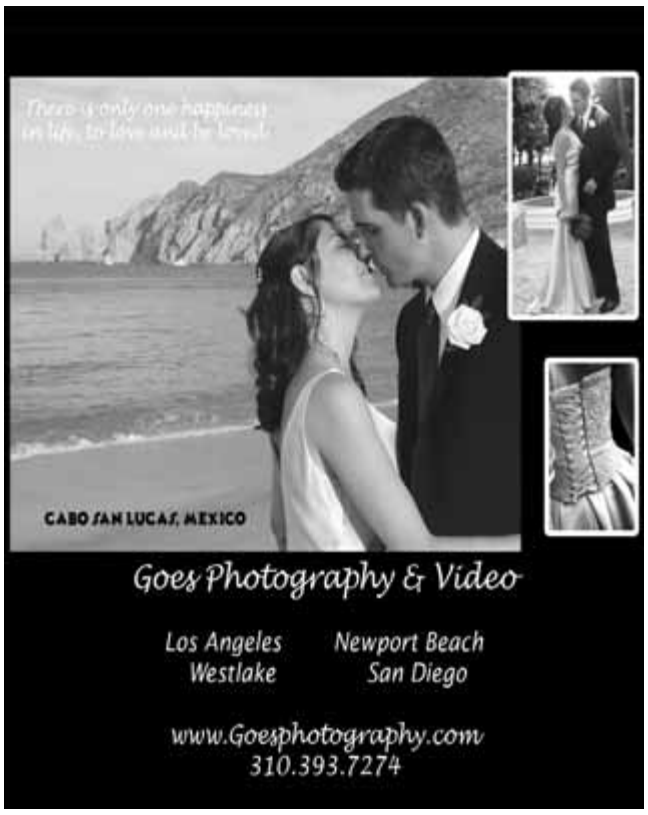
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Some find reindeer really tasty

LOOK-A-LIKE, from page 1

Not that Shipka plans to dine on the 17 pregnant reindeer he's studying at a University of Alaska Fairbanks research center. But the species has great livestock potential, as some Alaska reindeer herders have long known, he says.

The halter-broke animals sniffed at the air as Shipka led some visitors into a large pen at the Robert G. White Large Animal Research Station on a recent freezing afternoon. The reindeer scooted to the back of the enclosure, but within minutes their gregarious nature won out and they surrounded the visitors. A reindeer named Nymph nudged one of them in the leg.

"She's an inquisitive girl," Shipka said. "And a bit forward."

Shipka's study is looking at the reproductive biology of reindeer throughout their 215-day gestation, an effort he hopes will lead to improved management of the species.

The state's reindeer industry has roots going back to the late 1800s, when missionary Sheldon Jackson introduced Siberian reindeer to Alaska Natives in the Western Alaska peninsula. The idea was to create a sustainable alternative to then-dwindling numbers of subsistence animals, including caribou and whales, said wildlife biologist Bill Hauer. He is the manager of the 134-acre station, operated by the university's Institute of Arctic Biology.

Reindeer meat today is prized for its rich flavor, tenderness and low fat content. Also valued are byproducts such as antlers, which are used in some medicines including arthritis treatments, according to ecologist Greg Finstad, manager of the university's Reindeer Research Program, whose subjects live on a UAF experiment farm on campus.

Reindeer in Alaska also have been used to carry passengers, supplies and mail, not to mention mythical loads of presents.

Today only Alaska Natives can own Alaska-born reindeer, under a law passed by Congress in 1937, with rare exceptions such as UAF researchers. Most of the reindeer trade remains on the Seward Peninsula and so does much of the meat, although some is sold elsewhere in the state and beyond. Finstad said there are more than 25 roving herds between the peninsula and several Alaska islands, as well as a handful of fenced operations in the interior.

Seward Peninsula reindeer roam the tundra over large ranges, rounded up with the help of helicopters or four-wheelers — that is, if their handlers can find them.

Scores of reindeer have run off with their high-strung, migrating cousins from the Western Arctic caribou herd, whose numbers have skyrocketed in recent decades. The two are the same species, but are classified as two subspecies because there are enough differences. Reindeer — a domesticated subspecies — are shorter, rounder, less skittish and more sedentary.

As many as 225,000 caribou spend winters in the region, according to Finstad, who has worked with herders to study the fugitive reindeer problem, monitoring some of the animals through radio and satellite collars. The aim is to develop a new management strategy for the estimated 10,000- to 15,000 reindeer that remain in the region.

"Tens of thousands have left with caribou," Finstad said. "We've found a high mortality rate in those animals that left. Reindeer don't survive very long in a caribou world," where they are subject to rigors they never had to endure as domestic animals.

Among other studies, researchers are developing supplemental feed with mostly Alaska-grown ingredients to eliminate expensive shipping costs of products from outside the state. They're refining winter and summer formulas that include barley, chopped hay, fish waste, vitamins and molasses.

Researchers are studying how diet affects the quality of meat, as well. They're also looking at electrical stimulation of carcasses, a practice already done on cattle, pork and other livestock as an alternative to aging meat for several days. The effect of climate change on peninsula reindeer is another topic being tackled.

University scientists also have collaborated with researchers from Norway, Sweden and Finland as well as U.S. reindeer owners outside Alaska.

Occasionally research calls for slaughtering some male animals and, because taste is important to consumers, cooking the meat at a test kitchen on campus. The prime candidates for the job are 2-year-old steers in the research program, run by the university's School of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences.

Not just for hauling presents

By The Associated Press

ROAST RUDOLPH: Researchers at the University of Alaska Fairbanks say reindeer has great potential as a livestock species. The meat is prized for its rich flavor, tenderness and low fat content.

SUBSISTENCE ROOTS: Siberian reindeer were introduced to Alaska in the late 1800s as an alternative food source for Alaska Natives after numbers of native subsistence animals began to dwindle.

FUGITIVE HERDS: Scores of domesticated reindeer have run off with their wild, migrating cousins from the Western Arctic caribou herd.



Tracking Santa



Fabian Lewkowicz/Daily Press

A holiday decoration lights up the night in the Sunset Park area of the city.

Grant writer to help secure arts funding

ARTS FOR ALL, from page 1

that features the work of community professionals, students and faculty.

Arts for all organizers admit Santa Monica is a step ahead when it comes to establishing a permanent creative curriculum for students.

However, even with all the financial help, parents still are asked to pitch in for paintbrushes, canvases and other materials. The budget for supplies — less than $7 per student each semester — is still inadequate, said Amy Bouse, an Advanced Placement art teacher.

"It's certainly good to have that support and advocacy," Bouse said of Arts for All, the county's plan. "But in terms of real change, it's not yet palpable."

Two years after the district signed on in 2003, Whaley believes the county's approach is the way to go.

"This is about systemic change," Whaley said.

The county offered assistance to school districts that commit to adding to their arts programs. Sixteen districts have signed up.

It's a modest program, at least in terms of making up for years of diminished funding for the arts, advocates said. Many of the county's 1,800 public schools provide a spotty arts program at best. And, the emphasis on standardized testing coupled with district budget shortages in recent years have left arts educators wondering whether their subjects will ever be a school priority.

But Arts for All creators believe that having school boards approve long-range policies will help restore arts education at all levels.

The infrastructure to support a high quality, sequential K-12 arts education is measured by five factors. These include: an arts education policy adopted by the

See ARTS FOR ALL, page 12

■ The Arts Commission also created a web site, http://www.laartsed.org , listing more than 175 programs that meet California arts curriculum standards and that schools can use. The service is available to all schools, regardless of whether their districts have joined Arts for All.

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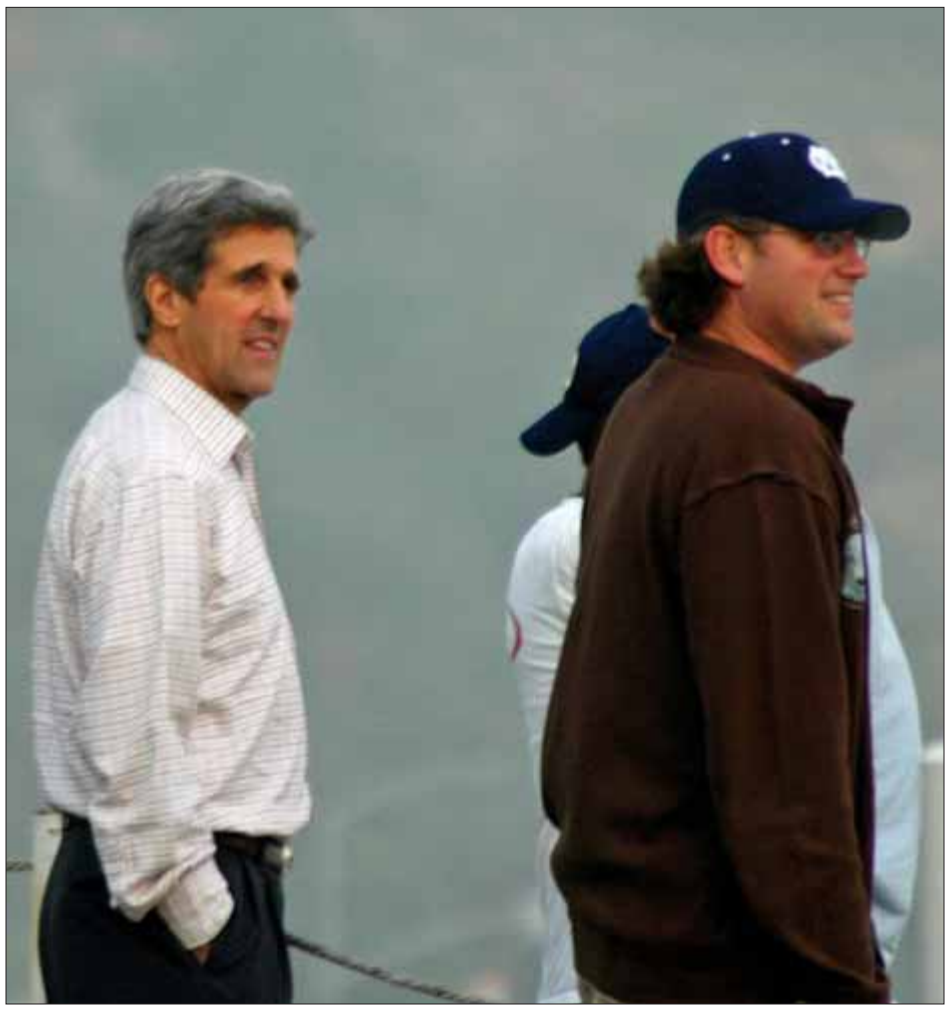
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The tide has him turned



Mike Malik/Special to the Daily Press

Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts, standing near the intersection of Sunset Boulevard and PCH, takes a gander out to the unusually high surf that pounded the coastline on Thursday.

One-third of districts in LA have arts policy

ARTS FOR ALL, from page 11

school board; an arts education plan adopted by the school board; a district level arts coordinator; an arts education budget of at least 5 percent of the district's total budget; and a student to credentialed arts teacher ratio no higher than 400 to 1.

Of the 60 districts within the county that participated in a recent survey, more than a third have developed an overall arts education policy, and a similar number of school boards are either working on or have approved plans for carrying them out. Only 15 percent of districts, however, have met the Arts for All budget goal and only 12 percent have an arts coordinator. Only 10 percent have at least one credentialed arts teacher for every 400 students, and 13 percent report having no credentialed arts teacher.

Once the plan is in place, the allocation of resources — staff and funding — becomes paramount. Arts coordinators act as the liaison between district policies and individual schools, providing the necessary leadership to implement the board-adopted policy and district-wide plan.

Providing a specific allocation of district dollars annually based upon the total budget is a strong indication of the value a district places on their arts education program, according to advocates.

Teachers, trained to carry out the arts curriculum, are also a critical element to its success. An appropriate ratio of credentialed art teachers must be supported and maintained, according to advocates.

Santa Monica schools have achieved many of the county's arts goals. The SMMUSD has an arts policy, plan and coordinator. Where programming exists, a ratio of students to art teachers of 326 to 1.

What's lacking locally to make a permanent arts program possible is the funding shift that will allow it to flourish at the elementary school level.

To help remedy this, the SMMUSD board of education has signed off on hiring a grant writer to see to it funding sources for all grade levels are met. The grant writer — who will receive a salary of $60,000 per year — will be sponsored for a two-year period from county and district sources.

In the first year, the county will kick in $40,000 for the grant writer and the district $20,000. In the second year, the district will pay the majority $40,000 and the county $20,000.

The SMMUSD's arts grant writer should begin working by the fall, Whaley said.

Individuals and companies in the entertainment industry chipped in to help participating districts pay for arts coordinators and some high-priority projects, such as the grant writers.





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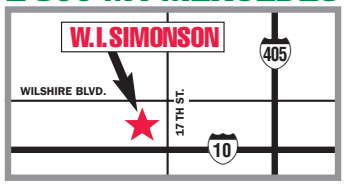
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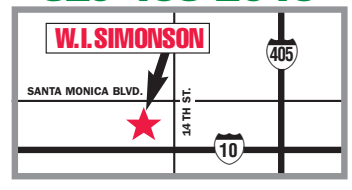


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NATIONAL

Border church highlights immigration debate

BY ABE LEVY
Associated Press Writer

EAGLE PASS, Texas — For illegal immigrants weary from a long desert journey, the Rev. Jim Loiacono is there with food, shelter and sometimes a trip to Western Union. He asks only to see U.S. Border Patrol papers that indicate the immigrant has promised to appear before a judge.

Loiacono and other priests along the border reflect the Roman Catholic Church's historic social teaching that no man-made law should keep the poor and oppressed from bettering their lives through immigration. But whether such compassion should trump laws protecting a country's borders is at the center of a growing national debate.

"It's a hard trek between Central America and the United States," said Loiacono, pastor of Our Lady of Refuge Catholic Church, a 500-member congregation four blocks from the U.S.-Mexico border. "They come here ragged and worn out. They really just need TLC at that point."

Around 9 million to 13 million illegal immigrants live in the United States, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, though some estimates run as high was 20 million.

In recent years, Eagle Pass, a town of about 22,000, has seen a rise in illegal immigrants who take advantage of its central location between San Antonio and Monterrey, Mexico.

Some have darted across the city's golf course, whose fairways line the banks of the Rio Grande. Others bunch on the sidewalks of busy streets en route to the downtown bus station. As many as 150 a day have passed through Eagle Pass this year.

Protecting them from serious illness and death is one thing, said Chris Simcox, co-founder of the anti-illegal immigration group the Minuteman Project. But it is entirely different to break federal law, he said.

"We have a long history of churches being sanctuaries because they perceive these people as being just children of God," he said. "But how do they know they're not aiding and abetting terrorists?"

Our Lady of Refuge Church does provide limited help to illegal immigrants who haven't yet declared themselves to the Border Patrol, Loiacono said. But he said he encourages them to do so and, without proof of it, they are not allowed to use the church's phones or given rides to the bus station or financial institutions.

Proof comes in the form of a "notice to appear" document, which means Border Patrol has checked them out and the person promises to appear before an immigration judge.

"There can't be any other way," Loiacono said. "No one would forgive us for blind acts of kindness if it turned out to be a terrorist. But food, shelter and clothing? No problem."

Those carrying a notice are generally not Mexicans — whose discovery causes a quick deportation just over the Rio Grande — but Central and South Americans who've made costly and often treacherous trips from their homelands.

The document, in practicality, permits them to pass security checkpoints temporarily and travel to another region of the U.S. to live and work. Ignoring the document risks deportation, if the Border Patrol finds the immigrant.

Hilario Leal, spokesman for the Del Rio sector of Border Patrol, which includes Eagle Pass, said agents were aware of the church's aid to immigrants, but the agency's focus is on border crossers and smugglers.

Eagle Pass Police Chief Tony Castaneda said he doesn't believe the church is breaking any laws or abusing its status in the community.

Instead, he said the church is keeping illegal immigrants from the type of desperation that makes criminal activity a tempting alternative, he said.

"They're not turning to petty crime and becoming a nuisance to our city," Castaneda said. "Once they leave Border Patrol, very little assistance is given to them. Word has spread quickly to come to that church."

Adding to the congregation's standing is its mysterious statue of the crucifix found floating in the Rio Grande by U.S. Border Patrol agents more than a year ago and later placed in the church's chapel.

Loiacono named the fiberglass, life-size piece "The Undocumented Christ" because he said it serves as a symbol of divine empathy for the plight of immigrants. Thousands of people have come to the church to pray in front of the statue and place photos of loved ones and notes with prayer requests on an adjacent peg board.

"People have an inalienable right to migrate and to better one's self and their potential," Loiacono said.

Founded in 1884 by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the church leaves its doors open overnight for immigrants to rest until the office opens in the morning.

"They come sometimes sopping wet in the middle of the night to our doorsteps," Loiacono said.

Had it not been for an Eagle Pass woman's familiarity with the church, Meidy Garcia said she and her 3-year-old daughter, Susan, could have died. During their two-week journey from Honduras, they slept in a rat-infested house, endured double-crossing guides and ached from hunger and thirst.

They crossed chest-high water in the Rio Grande and walked in chilly temperatures for a half hour before Border Patrol agents arrested them. Their clothes were wet and their emotions drained as they spent four hours being questioned at the Border Patrol station.

Afterward, they didn't know where to go, Garcia said, until the woman, whose name they never learned, stopped to give them a ride to the church.

They slept on cots inside the church hall with warm blankets and frequent visits by the nuns and Loiacono.





NATIONAL

Mexican city still has hopes for port to service Arizona

BY THOMAS STAUFFER
Associated Press Writer

TUCSON, Ariz. — The semiannual meeting of officials from Arizona and Sonora often spawns hopeful statements about the little Sonoran port that thinks it can.

But the recent history of the underused Port of Guaymas, 320 miles south of Tucson, is of a port that couldn't.

That history is littered with pledges and plans to develop the Mexican port into a significant gateway for international trade that could serve as Arizona's seaport. Those plans never seem to pan out, and traffic at the port dwindles. The week of Dec. 11, two ships were scheduled to arrive at the port, one of them a passenger ferry.

But now, conditions are different, say officials at the Port Authority of Guaymas. Now there is an extreme backlog of ships at the port of Long Beach, Calif., an unprecedented flood of imports from China, record-high copper prices and a post-drought revival of Mexican agriculture. The possibilities impressed Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano, who toured the port with Sonoran Gov. Eduardo Bours in early December as part of an Arizona-Mexico Commission meeting.

"As you drive around the area, there is construction and economic activity aplenty," Napolitano said. Arizona and Sonora "are hot right now in terms of energy and vitality, and as the commission makes clear, there is a great deal of momentum for creating the Arizona-Sonora region as an economic entity and partners to the world."

Guaymas, she said, could be the region's portal to the world. And if the port assumes that role, the resulting increase in shipping could give Tucson big economic benefits. Goods headed both ways along roads and rails from Guaymas could mean more local jobs in warehousing, logistics and manufacturing.

During the tour, port spokesman Guillermo Von Borstel noted that container ships currently wait 14 to 21 days to unload at Long Beach.

Guaymas could well serve as one of several "reliever ports" for Long Beach, particularly for shipments that are time sensitive, he said. The proper investments in infrastructure and equipment could transform Guaymas from a "hinterlands" port that primarily moves bulk materials — oil, cement, copper and crops — to a port that handles a variety of goods in containers, Von Borstel said.

"Our major focus at the port for our development this year is a container terminal that would be built and operated by a private company and the corridor for trucking that would move those containers," Von Borstel said.

At present, Guaymas' port lacks the water depth, access roads and cranes to move containers. If the port gains the capacity to handle them, port officials estimate they'd move 100,000 containers in the first year and be capable of moving three times that in future years, Von Borstel said.

But the Tucson man who built, owns and operates his own local inland port said container business at Guaymas is still something of a pipe dream.

"At the end of the day, economics will make or break things," said Alan Levin, owner of the Port of Tucson, an industrial park and "intermodal" center that moves containers between railroad cars and trucks. "The economics of unloading a supercontainer (ship) in Long Beach will far outweigh unloading a smaller container (ship) in Guaymas."

Levin said he respects the efforts of those who want to increase business at the port and along the corridor from Guaymas to Tucson. In fact, his business would benefit. But the reality is that other ports are already in a better position to handle Long Beach's backlog, he said.

"There are other ports along the West Coast like Vancouver, and there are other ports in Mexico, and there is Houston for ships that can fit in the Panama Canal," he said.

The lures of increased cargo at Guaymas and its spin-off benefits to Arizona were attractive enough for the state to fund an extensive study by Arizona State University of the port's potential and the condition of the infrastructure along the Tucson-Guaymas corridor that would support it, said Augustine Garcia, director of the Tucson-Mexico Trade Office.

The results of the study, expected to be released in February, could have a profound impact on investments in the port and the corridor, Garcia said. Colby Bower, policy coordinator for the Phoenix-based Border Trade Alliance, expects an improved outlook for Arizona and Guaymas.

"With Long Beach the way it is and along with some other things, it sounds like the numbers may really be lining up a little bit better, and that's why the study is what everybody is waiting for," Bower said. "The initial indications are that Guaymas could take significant pressure off of Long Beach if it were developed into a deep-water port."

Bower said the development of "e-seals" — electronic security seals — could also be a major boon to ports like Guaymas. Such seals allow customs officials to track shipments at all times and be apprised if a seal on a container is broken, he said. U.S. Customs officials could apply such seals at Guaymas, he said.

"More than anything it shows you that a container hasn't been compromised," Bower said. "The idea is, if we know what's going into the container once the electric seal is on there, why should it have to be stopped?"

Sealed containers could then whiz through international border crossings like the Mariposa Port of Entry in Nogales without waiting for Customs officials or being inspected there. Under current conditions, it's not unusual to see U.S.-bound trucks at Mariposa lined up for several miles. Trains are also subject to inspections and long waits, Bower said.

The ability to handle container ships at Guaymas would require dredging at least part of the port to make it deep enough to handle ships that carry about 4,500 containers. A crane being offered by officials at Long Beach, which is currently retooling to handle the next generation of ships known as "supercontainers," would lift the containers off the ships at Guaymas and onto rail cars or trucks. Access roads leading to the port would also have to be improved, Von Borstel said.

Estimates on how much those improvements would cost and how they would be paid for by added commerce are part of the ASU study, Garcia said.

What would be considered an insignificant number of containers to Long Beach would make a big difference for Guaymas, which has operated at less than 20 percent of its capacity in recent years, Garcia said.

Long Beach moved more than 5 million containers last year. "The overflow at Long Beach is so great that everybody is looking for a piece of it," Garcia said.

"Even if you get only a tiny fraction of the action, that would have a huge impact here." The initial indications are that Guaymas could take significant pressure off Long Beach if it were developed into a deep-water port.

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NATIONAL

There goes the neighborhood: Mobile parks close

BY KATHLEEN HENNESSEY
Associated Press Writer

LAS VEGAS — Wading nearly knee-deep in the mattresses, sooted clothing and discarded tires dumped outside his trailer, Rubin Reams wants visitors to know he hasn't always lived this way.

The 51-year-old poker dealer never had much of a financial cushion. But he worked full time and steadily, and owned a 40-foot double tip-out trailer he happily called home.

Then the mobile home park he lived in was sold to a developer, and the rug — like the land — was pulled out from under him.

"I've always been able to survive. But sometimes I can't believe I got into this spot," he said, surveying his departed neighbors' abandoned belongings. "I feel like I've been slowly backed into a corner."

Reams is caught in a trend sweeping Las Vegas and other real estate markets where land prices and development are booming. Park owners are increasingly selling out for massive profits to developers who covet the land for posh condominiums, strip malls and office parks.

In the Las Vegas area, where the cost of an undeveloped acre has risen more than 80 percent in a year, 14 mobile home parks have closed or announced plans to close this year alone. That's more than the seven previous years combined. Each sale takes another bite out of the diminishing supply of affordable housing in southern Nevada and disrupts the lives of people who too often have little to fall back on.

Experts say the pattern is being repeated in pockets across the nation, particularly in Sun Belt and Pacific Northwest states.

Arizona has seen 30 parks close in the past two years, many in the path of Phoenix's eastern sprawl. Washington's mobile homeowners' association estimates the state has lost 500 mobile home spaces in the past six months and puts the vacancy rate at parks at about 1 percent.

Florida is losing 5,000 to 10,000 mobile home spaces a year, according to industry estimates. Skyrocketing land values along the coast and the creep of development inland is driving the trend.

"When these communities were developed in the '50s and '60s they were out in the middle of nowhere," said Frank Williams, executive director of the Florida Manufactured Housing Association. "Now they're in the middle of everything."

Many of the park owners who sell are mom and pop operators who have put off repairs and upgrades for years, can't accommodate newer, larger manufactured homes and charge little for rent. At the same time, corporations are opening bigger manufactured housing communities often filled with pricey high-end homes.

The shift to upscale may be good for the image of the mobile home industry, but it's pricing some out of the market, said George Allen, a mobile home park owner and real estate management consultant who writes an industry newsletter.

"These parks that are closing tend to be filled with older, small homes. Those homes are far more than affordable — they're cheap. It's for people who can't afford any other kind of housing," Allen said.

In Las Vegas, a city once known as an oasis of low-cost living, affordable housing is dwindling. The median price of existing homes has reached $280,000, while the median household income hovers at about $49,300, according to Applied Analysis, a local research firm. Nurses, teachers, senior citizens and casino workers like Reams are increasingly finding it hard to buy into the market.

"I think it's a sad commentary that in a service-oriented community we haven't taken this on," said Renee Diamond, head of the Nevada Division of Manufactured Housing. "If we don't provide affordable housing for the people who are keeping the (Las Vegas) Strip open, we won't have the doormen and housekeepers and dealers in the casinos. Sooner or later we'll run out of the people to do our service work."

For many of these people, mobile homes and trailer-park living are a viable and attractive alternative, she said. On the low end of the rental scale, homeowners like Reams can buy a trailer for several hundred dollars and pay $320 a month in rent. Slots in newer communities, which often cater to retirees and larger mobile homes, rent for about $550 a month. Residents don't have to worry about daunting down payments or bad credit, and many are drawn to the notion of owning their home, Diamond said.

"I'd just rather have something that was mine," said 39-year-old Shawn Kirby, a former resident of the now shuttered Tropicana Mobile Home park just off the Las Vegas Strip.

When the Tropicana sold to a Florida developer, Kirby and other residents were faced with two options: Let the owners pay for the move to another park or take a lump sum payout of the market value of their mobile homes. Kirby, like many Tropicana residents, took the payout — which at $3,700 dollars, was four times his monthly disability check.

Days after the deadline for relocation, Kirby was back at the eerie ghost town of abandoned trailers at the Tropicana looking for work helping the few lingering residents pack up and move. Several residents were still squatting in empty trailers without electricity or water. Scavengers picked through empty homes marked with orange spray paint to indicate they were slated for removal and probable destruction.

"It turned pretty dark," said Reams of his last few months at the Tropicana. Some desperate residents left behind what they didn't want or couldn't afford to take. The space in front of his trailer home became a de facto trash dump.

The process of uprooting a neighborhood is never pleasant or problem-free, said Marolyn Mann, executive director of the Nevada Manufactured Home Community Owners, a park owners' group. Mann noted that Nevada law requires owners to give six months notice to residents and follow strict procedures for removing or buying the homes. Many owners give more time and pay more than the law requires, she said. But in the end, park owners have a right to sell their land, she said.

"A lot of the people, they forget about all the past years when they had the benefits (of mobile home living.) All of a sudden they find themselves in a situation where they haven't planned for the future," she said. "I think it's appropriate to compensate residents fairly. But by their very definition these are mobile homes, meaning they're supposed to be mobile. They were never meant to be permanent."

Nevada state officials say the law could be changed to benefit residents. Under current regulations, park owners are allowed to deduct the cost of the disposal of the home from the payout. That cost can often eat up the bulk of the payment, particularly for older mobile homes.

"In essence the homeowner can still end up getting zero," said Allen Scott, an investigator at the Nevada Division of Manufactured Housing.

Government officials in other states are looking at ways to cushion the transition. Housing advocates in Arizona have pushed for "right of first refusal" laws that give residents the first shot at buying the land before it can sold.

In Florida, local officials have begun to seek compensation from the deepest pockets. Elected leaders in Pinellas County, Fla., where 92,000 people live in mobile homes, approved a measure this month requiring developers wanting to rezone parks to pay rental assistance to residents for two years after relocation.

That additional assistance would have helped Reams, whose check from the Tropicana helped him excavate his trailer from the rubbish pile and set out in search of a new place to live.

He stayed at hotels and campgrounds for weeks, until finding a park off a highway just outside the city. His rent is a third more than what he paid at the Tropicana — and more than he can afford in the long-term. But he said it will have to do until he can find something else.



NATIONAL

Virgin of Guadalupe hawks designer jeans

BY YVONNE WINGETT
Associated Press Writer

PHOENIX — The image of the beloved Virgin of Guadalupe has moved from the solemn walls of Roman Catholic churches and onto the stylish hips of fashionistas like Priscila Ferrand.

The Mexican version of the Virgin Mary is on the Scottsdale nurse's $300 belt, threaded through her low-rise jeans. Her dark-skinned face shines on a silver buckle surrounded by green stones.

For almost five centuries, since her legendary appearance to a peasant Aztec atop a Mexican mountain, she has been the religious icon of the devout. Today, la Virgen de Guadalupe is also a pop icon. Trendsetters like Ferrand are rocking her sun-rayed image because it's chic, not necessarily because they're believers.

"It's a piece of jewelry," confessed Ferrand, who grew up Catholic in Panama.

The image of the Virgin's serene face, green cloak and red robe is common in the Southwest and other heavily Latino areas throughout the United States. She is a symbol of hope, liberation and compassion and is the most popular religious symbol in Mexico.

But lately her status in the pop world has risen with celebrities such as Gwen Stefani, Britney Spears and world soccer star David Beckham wearing Virgin-decorated tees and accessories. On the Internet, in grocery stores and at boutiques, she adorns shower curtains, kimonos, key chains and candles.

Christianity in the marketplace is nothing new, especially with movies, musicals and bracelets of Jesus Christ, but the Virgin's popularity is attributed to a growing number of businesses using her image to capture a fast-growing Hispanic market and to women who see her as a strong role model.

"She was once just a Mexican icon, then a Mexican-American icon, now she's become an American icon," said Kristy Nabhan-Warren, assistant professor of American religions at Augustana College in Illinois and author of Virgin of El Barrio. "(People) take symbols that sometimes are attached to institutional churches and make them their own."

The story of Mexico's spiritual mother began in 1531, a time of unrest. She appeared just before dawn to Juan Diego at Tepeyac, near Mexico City, and speaking in his native Nahuatl language, she told him to build a church on the hill.

As the story is told, when Diego delivered her message to the bishop of Mexico City, he demanded proof of the apparition. The Virgin caused out-of-season roses to grow and directed Diego to gather them in his cloak and return to the bishop. When Diego unrolled the cloak before the bishop, the roses spilled out, and the image of the Virgin's dark-skinned face surrounded by glowing light and a turquoise wrap remained.

The cloak is on display in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City. Millions of Mexicans descend on the shrine. Nearby, vendors line crowded streets, peddling Virgin woven wall hangings, posters, electric fountains and clocks.

The Virgin Mary is held by many Hispanic Catholics as the most important in the hierarchy of religious figures. Her popularity in Mexico and Latin America intensified in Jan. 23, 1999, when Pope John Paul II crowned her patron saint and evangelizer of the entire American continent.

In Phoenix, men and women of different ethnic and religious backgrounds are buying up Virgin Christmas ornaments, ashtrays, candles and medallions at Suenos Latin American Imports. Sales of Virgin products have soared, said owner Robert Bitto, with today's sales reaching $10,000 compared with about $200 in 1999, the first year he stocked shelves with her image.

Customers buy Virgin-decorated ashtrays to help them quit smoking, he said. "You don't want to put your cigarette butt out on her face, do you?"

They also buy greeting cards, handbags and Virgin-decorated mouse pads.

"One woman came up to my register, slapped down a mouse pad and said, 'I'm getting this for my husband. Maybe he'll think twice next time he clicks on his dirty Internet (sites),"' Bitto said.

Self-described Virgin addict Elisa Walker, who is not religious, has spent at least $4,000 on crosses, paintings, key chains and statues, which range from 4 inches to 6 feet tall.

"She's kind of like the new Frida," the 38-year-old said, referring to legendary Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, who is famous for her iconic self-portraits. "The pieces are kitschy and are kind of like modern art."

The Tarjeta Prepagada La Guadalupana, a $5, 120-minute prepaid phone card bearing the patroness, outsells other cards, said Pedro Adun, president and chief executive officer of Easy Telecommunications Inc. The Phoenix company did at least $600,000 in Guadalupe cards last year, he said. It's permissible to use her as a marketing tool, Adun said, because customers can keep the card as a souvenir.

"Sure, it's a phone card, but it has value with the Virgin," he said. "They don't want to destroy the face of the Virgin."

Twenty- to 70-somethings are snatching up $189 to $360 belt buckles, rings, T-shirts and chokers at Barbwire Western Couture boutique in Scottsdale.

"People have said good things happen to them when they wear it," owner Sheila Bryson said. "Everybody except for Mormons and Buddhists will buy it."

The commercialization of one of the church's most sacred figures irritates some Catholic priests and parishioners. Plastering her image on phone cards, belt buckles and nightclubs is irreverent, said Maribel Bueno, 25.

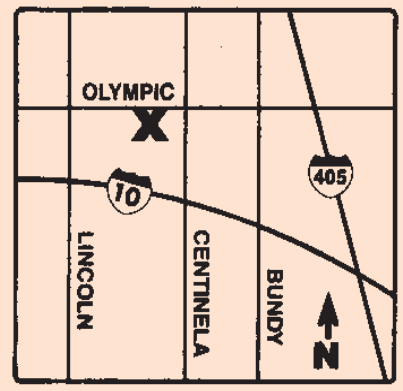
"Some of them don't even know who she is," the administrative assistant from Phoenix said. "As a Catholic, I wish they had respect. She's sacred."

Priests such as John Bonavitacola hope that those who latch onto Guadalupe's image keep in mind her message of compassion.

"If they really knew the message, which is really concern for the poor and outcast, they might not be so quick to cash in on it," said Bonavitacola, of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Tempe. "It cheapens it."

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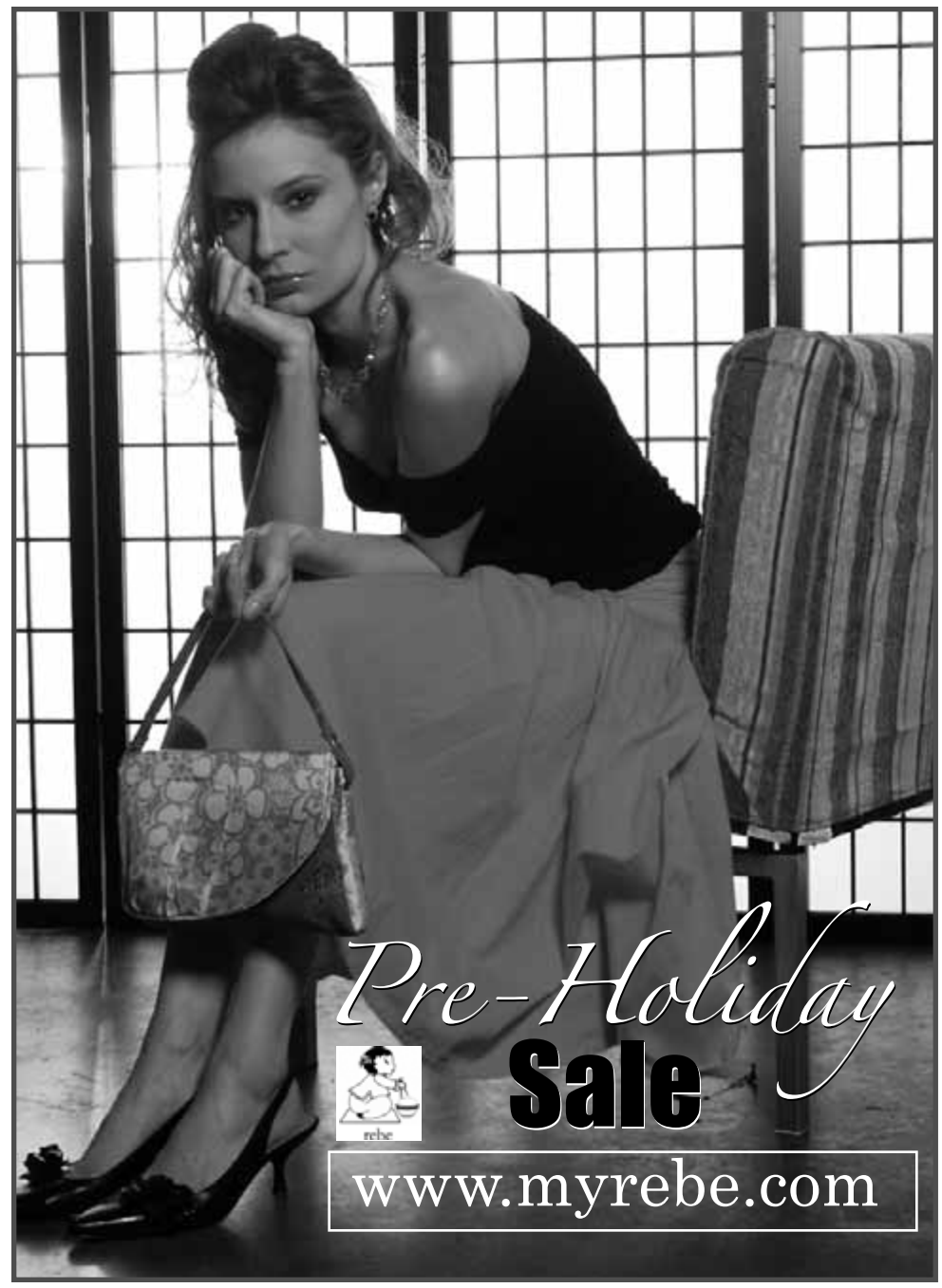
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INTERNATIONAL

Military appears ready to bring troops home

BY ROBERT BURNS
AP Military Writer

FALLUJAH, Iraq — Just days after Iraq's elections, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld on Friday announced the first of what is likely to be a series of U.S. combat troop drawdowns in Iraq in 2006.

Rumsfeld, addressing U.S. troops at this former insurgent stronghold, said President Bush has authorized new cuts below the 138,000 level that has prevailed for most of this year.

Rumsfeld did not reveal the exact size of the troop cut, but Pentagon officials have said it could be as much as 7,000 combat troops. The Pentagon has not announced a timetable for troop reductions, but indications are that the force could be cut significantly by the end of 2006.

That could include substantial reductions well before the November midterm congressional elections, in which Bush's war policies seem certain to be a major issue.

Rumsfeld said two Army brigades that had been scheduled for combat tours _ one from Fort Riley, Kan., the other now in Kuwait _ would no longer deploy to Iraq. That would reduce the number of combat brigades in Iraq from 17 to 15.

"The effect of these adjustments will reduce forces in Iraq by the spring of 2006 below the current high of 160,000 during the (Iraqi) election period to below the 138,000 baseline that had existed before the most recent elections," the defense secretary said.

Rumsfeld aides said details were to be provided later at the Pentagon.

Further reductions will be considered "at some point in 2006," after the new Iraqi government is in place and is prepared to discuss the future U.S. military presence, Rumsfeld added.

The Pentagon sent an extra 20,000 troops to Iraq to bolster security during the recent elections, and Rumsfeld has previously said those 20,000 would be withdrawn in January to return U.S. force levels to a 138,000 baseline.

Friday's announcement marks the first time Rumsfeld has said troop levels will dip below that baseline.

Rumsfeld, who has said repeatedly that troop reductions depend on political progress in Iraq and improvements in Iraq's own security forces, was meeting with U.S. troops in several locations Friday. He arrived in the country Thursday for his 11th visit since the U.S.-led invasion in March 2003.

Bush is under growing pressure from the Republican-run Congress to cut U.S. forces in Iraq. The conflict's acceptance by American voters has plummeted as the war's toll has mounted to more than 2,100 U.S. war dead and 15,000 wounded.

Bush, Rumsfeld and other administration officials have said a withdrawal would begin when the U.S.-trained Iraqi security forces show sufficient signs of being able to defend the country against insurgents.

There were 159,000 U.S. troops in Iraq on Thursday.

Iraq on Oct. 15 held a constitutional referendum, and on Dec. 15 held elections for a full-term government.

For the first time since the insurgency took hold in Iraq in midsummer 2003, Rumsfeld was spending the night in the country. He previously had made Iraq day trips but spent the night in other countries in the region.

In Afghanistan earlier Thursday, military officials said they were progressing toward eliminating the Taliban resistance and al-Qaida terrorists who continue sporadic violence against U.S. troops.

But some officers said the hostile forces were making gains by acquiring more advanced weaponry, such as armor-piercing munitions, and improving their training and organization.

Asked whether conditions in southern Afghanistan are more dangerous than earlier in the conflict, Capt. Matthew Harmon, commander of headquarters company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group, said in an interview, "That's a very fair assessment." Harmon is serving his fourth tour in Afghanistan.

Capt. Chris Sample said the 1st Battalion had engaged in 88 firefights in the past six months. That is more than in its three previous Afghanistan deployments combined, he said. There also has been a recent increase in vehicle-borne suicide bombers, he said.







COMICS

The Dinette Set by Julie Larson



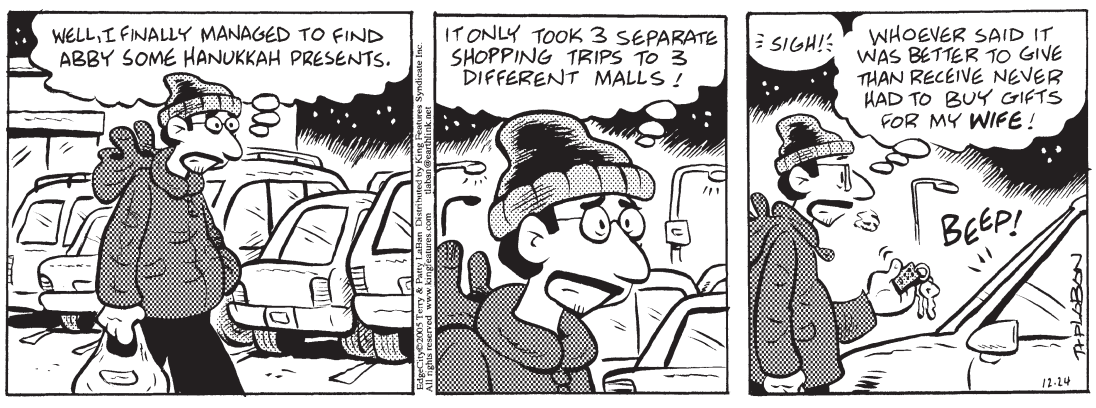
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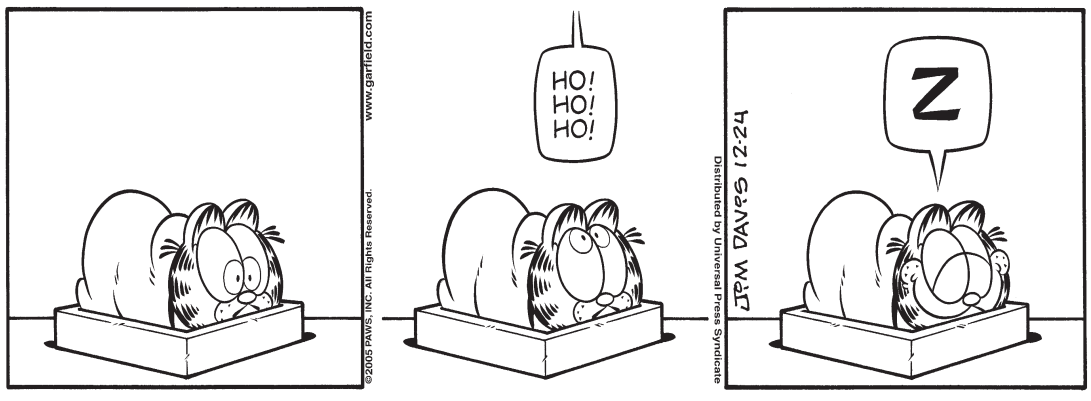


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18 Minty herbs
19 Carrier of some NFL games
21 "Aw, shucks!"
22 Kiss cause
25 Gal of song
26 Mark's replacement
27 Beats badly
29 Forget
33 Toy builders
34 Smoothing tool
35 Jury member
36 Raspy
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38 Place for a plug
39 Patricia of "Hud"
40 Holiday ring

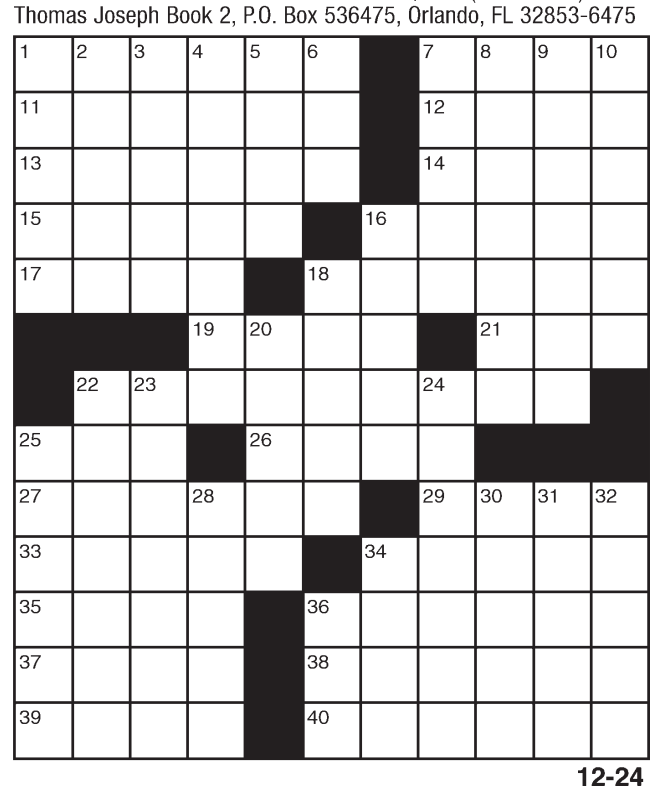
DOWN

1 Fastening device
2 Rome fountain
3 Author Shute
4 Christmas tree hangers
5 Music's Atkins
6 London's — Gardens
7 Deep sleeps
8 Map-maker Vespucci
9 One out early
10 Threat words
16 Chair worker
18 Good grade
20 Instructions units
22 Dietrich of film
23 Randy Newman song
24 Not in time
25 Squelch
28 Jack's "Ironweed" co-star
30 One of Donald's wives
31 Detail map
32 Saw things?
34 Decant
36 Science question

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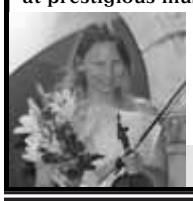
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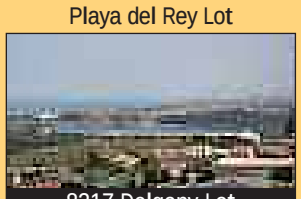
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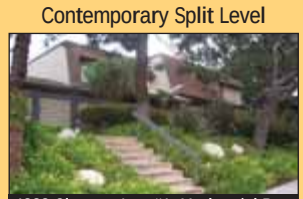
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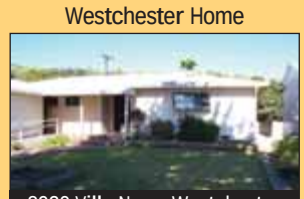
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