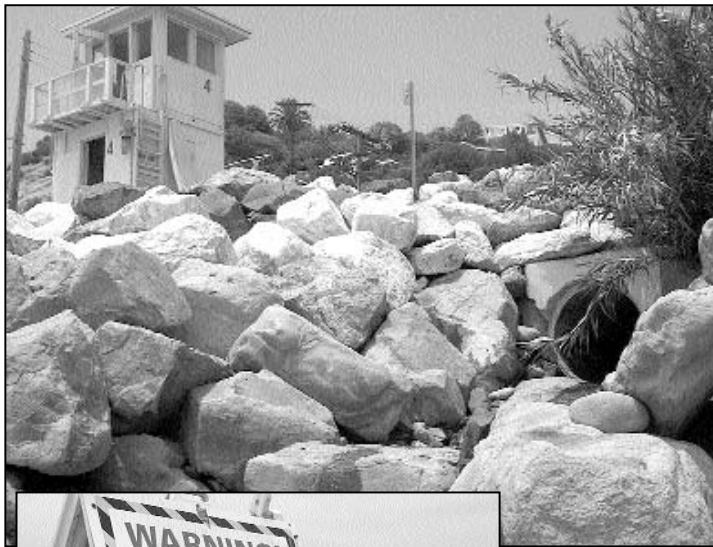


Santa Monica Daily Press

A newspaper with issues



File photos
When Los Angeles sewage sub stations overflow, some of the raw waste travels through run-off drains and into the Santa Monica Bay, which has resulted in numerous beach closings over the years. A judge has ruled L.A. must fix its sewage system to prevent future releases.

Judge rules Los Angeles liable for sewage spills

Many spills resulted in Santa Monica beaches being closed

AMANDA RIDDLE
 Associated Press Writer

LOS ANGELES — The city is liable for nearly 300 sewage spills that violated federal and state water quality laws, a federal judge ruled Monday.

U.S. District Court Judge Ronald Lew ruled in a lawsuit filed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board and Santa Monica Baykeeper, a pollution watchdog group.

The suit seeks penalties and improvements to the city's wastewater facilities. Los Angeles averages two sewage spills per day, which is one of the highest rates in the nation.

Many of the 300 sewage spills from Los Angeles have resulted in closed beaches along Santa Monica and Venice Beach, officials said.

"Over the years, millions of gallons of raw sewage have spilled, resulting in threats to public health, beach closures and devastation to our waterways," said Fran Diamond, who chairs the water quality control board.

"This is a billion-dollar coastal economy and we need to spend our money on making sure the sewers are improved."

— FRAN DIAMOND
 L.A. Regional Water Quality Control Board

Under the Clean Water Act, Lew can now fine the city up to \$27,500 for each of the 297 spills, or more than \$8 million, and require the city to enact measures to

See RULING, page 5

Former East German medieval town recreated in gingerbread

BY ANDREW MCKENZIE-MCHARG
 Associated Press Writer

ROSTOCK, Germany — The stepped gables of this east German city's medieval center have been restored to Old World splendor this holiday season.

There's even a draping of fresh snow — only the flakes are sugar and the little buildings are gingerbread.

Sven Grumbach, the creator of Rostock's sweet replica, hopes his creation of hundreds of cookie houses, covering more than 4,300 square feet, will set a record for the world's largest gingerbread city.

Certainly the quantities of ingredients required to build the sugary community were impressive: 1,760 pounds of flour, 705 pounds of honey, 880 pounds of almonds and 175 pounds of raisins, as well as 2,400 eggs.

Researchers at the London-based Guinness Book of Records said they had not yet seen Grumbach's application for a record, but the prospects looked good.

"We already have a record for the

largest gingerbread house and are always interested in things that are on the one hand quantifiable and on the other, new and original," researcher Kate White said in a telephone interview.

Beyond the goal of a record, Grumbach, who runs a local strawberry farm and sweet shop, hopes to bring a bit of cheer to residents of this gritty city in the economically depressed east of Germany.

"Visitors get a thrill out of the sense of recognizing something familiar — perhaps a street where they live, or a building which they know," he said.

Rostock, like so many other towns in Germany, was practically leveled by Allied bombs during World War II. Grumbach used pictures from a 16th century scroll that managed to survive the war as a guideline for his gingerbread city.

It will be March before Grumbach and his team learn whether they have achieved a Guinness record. By then, the gingerbread city most likely will be a thing of the past. Its individual buildings were auctioned off Sunday to raise money for a local children's charity.

Unless otherwise noted, judge rules art sale is final

BY JOHN WOOD
 Special to the Daily Press

Taking home a piece of art to see if it looks good on the wall before buying it is usually not problematic, unless you don't make it clear with the gallery on your intentions, a judge ruled recently.

Art collector Anne Alcyone claims she was duped out of nearly \$4,000 earlier this year by a gallery in Santa Monica's Bergamot Station because the art she thought she was borrowing turned out to be a final sale.

Alcyone said the gallery refused to take back three \$1,200 abstract oil paintings, even though she bought the artwork on the condition that she and her husband approve of how the pieces fit in their home, Alcyone said.

At issue was whether or not the pieces

"It was like wishful thinking. She just ran the card and hoped I'd keep it."

— ANNE ALCYONE
 Santa Monica art collector

— created by an unidentified Los Angeles artist — were bought on "approval," a practice that's very common in the art world, especially with big ticket items. Buying a piece of artwork on approval

See GALLERY, page 5

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★★-So-so ★-Difficult

♈ ARIES (March 21-April 19)
★★★★ Know that the pressure is off. Others seek you out. You might be dismayed by what you hear, but on the other hand, you gain a new perspective on your life. Tension builds from others' expectations. Help others see this issue. Tonight: Go along with someone else's plans.

♉ TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
★★★ Make an effort toward friends and loved ones. You allow others to help you see a different perspective. Your laughter helps others see what might not be realistic. Others have expectations that might be close to impossible to reach. Tonight: As you like it.

♊ GEMINI (May 21-June 20)
★★★ Realize your limits more carefully when dealing with loved ones. Not everyone has to agree with what you say and think. Be willing to break ground. Use your creativity to allow others to see life from a more realistic perspective. Tonight: Play away.

♋ CANCER (June 21-July 22)
★★★★ It might be the day after Christmas, but you still can enjoy some downtime with a child or loved one. Take the day off and don't get caught up in the post-season whirl. Realize your limits with a loved one you care about. Tonight: Happy at home.

♌ LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)
★★★★ Keep talks active, allowing many around you to share their ideas. Your verbal skills emerge, helping draw a different or new perspective. Not everything is as you see it. Take a risk and move forward in the near future. Tonight: Hang at a favorite spot.

♍ VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)
★★★★ Make an effort to touch base with others. Realize what is going on with a child or loved one. You could decide that someone close to you might be overly materialistic or touchy. Now is the time to shake up the status quo. Tonight: Treat someone to dinner.

♎ LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)
★★★★ Your mood cheers others up, helping you to see situations with renewed and different interest. Handle a personal matter in a more direct and caring manner. Pressure builds with a family member. Tonight: As you like it.

♏ SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)
★★★ Nearly everything is possible, but right now you might be too worn out to see it. Don't push yourself too hard; remember, we all easily tend to go into overload. Ask for extra space and time, if need be. Think positively. Tonight: Get a good night's sleep.

♐ SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)
★★★★ Friends call with a lot of news. Listen; in fact, it might be easier to set up plans and get together with others. You could find that many around you want and need the change of pace. Go for a leisurely few days. Tonight: Where your friends are.

♑ CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)
★★★ Typically, when others cannot get their work done, you can. Now, how fun can it be to go to the office and work? Yet others count on you doing just that. Understand when you've had enough. Call it an early day, if possible. Tonight: A must appearance.

♒ AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)
★★★★ You might not be able to make the impression on others that you would like. Know when you've had enough, or when you need to go in a different direction. If possible, schedule a day trip, or relax by doing something unique. Yes, difference works. Tonight: Head in your own direction.

♓ PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)
★★★ Don't disagree with a partner. You could be confused about what is going on with this person. The best approach is to start talking and opening up. You might be amazed by how different the two of you are. Tonight: Togetherness works.

QUOTE of the DAY

"Old age is the only disease you don't look forward to being cured of."

— From the movie *Citizen Kane* (1941)

Santa Monica Daily Press

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LOCAL □ STATE



CALIFORNIA BRIEFS

L.A. Mayor boosts Washington D.C. lobby

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Mayor James K. Hahn moved to boost the city's clout in Washington and Sacramento by hiring a prominent lobbyist in the nation's capital and rallying the area's legislators to begin acting more as a team.

Hahn was criticized during the secession debate for not doing enough to get federal and state help.

Hahn told secession activists he was putting together a \$228,000 annual contract with the Patton Boggs firm and he met this week with seven members of the city's congressional delegation to better coordinate the city's pitch for more money from the federal government.

"We are bringing on some lobbying help in Washington so we get our fair share back there," Hahn said.

A study last summer by the Rose Institute of State and Local Government in Claremont found that Los Angeles ranked 38th among the 88 cities in Los Angeles County in per capita state funding, and eighth for federal funding.

"The city, relative to its size, has been particularly ineffective in influencing its congressional delegation and its state legislative delegation," said Steven B. Frates, author of the study.

Bumper stickers used to advertise for unwanted babies

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Using bumper stickers, the county's 12,000 vehicles will soon be the nation's first government fleet to encourage new mothers to safely surrender unwanted newborns.

Bumper stickers promoting the 72-hour Safe Haven Law and a hot line telephone number for more information were distributed Monday as part of the educational program to prevent infant abandonment, said John Musella, an aide to Supervisor Don Knabe.

Knabe spent \$3,000 to pay for the first batch of bumper stickers.

"Our goal is zero babies thrown away in LA County," Knabe said. "These stickers are the latest tool we have to get the word to the public that there are alternatives."

The stickers are the first step in a campaign to better advertise the law, which gives new mothers three days to surrender their newborns without fear of prosecution.

County officials are also considering plans to get the Safe Haven logo and the hot line number on Metropolitan Transportation Authority buses.

Last year, 14 babies were abandoned in the county. Of those, 11 died. Of the 13 babies abandoned this year, eight died. An additional nine newborns were safely surrendered to fire departments and hospitals.

The county's 157 fire stations and city fire stations in Long Beach and Glendale also are designated as Safe Haven drop-off points.

Child molester sentenced to 200 years

By The Associated Press

PASADENA — A repeat felon was sentenced to 200 years to life for assaulting and raping a 5-year-old girl in her home.

Rodney Dion Brown, 35, of San Gabriel had been out of prison only two months when he attacked the girl on May 4.

"You not only used force, you choked and beat her," Superior Court Judge Michelle Rosenblatt said during Monday's sentencing.

Deputy District Attorney Michael Carter said the sentence "accurately shows the seriousness of the offense."

Brown was staying at a North Summit Avenue apartment with other family members when, given a few moments with the girl, he took her into a bedroom. He choked, raped and beat the girl.

Brown has an extensive criminal record for rape, robbery and burglary. Since he was 18, he has spent only nine months out of custody, the prosecutor said.



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 sees more of the new northwest swell, but with a small decrease in size thanks to further fading of the old west-northwest.

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

Location	Thursday	Friday	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
El Porto	2-3'/Fair	2-3'/Fair	N/A

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California is dealing with a major budget crisis. The state is in the red by over \$30 billion, and in Santa Monica, as well as other cities and towns, public educators are feeling an excruciating financial pinch as a result. But some educators wonder if the public really understands or cares about the dire situation at hand.

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LOCAL

Getting new perspectives is not admitting failure



TITTINGER'S TAKE

By Michael J. Tittinger

There is a certain clarity that accompanies detachment.

A current of negativity has pervaded the project ever since Santa Monica officials announced the decision last summer to hire a New York consulting firm — an outside consulting firm — to best determine how the city can reimagine the Third Street Promenade. The primary point of contention with residents and vendors alike seems to have focused on the fact that the Project for Public Spaces (PPS) was given approximately \$55,000 to assist the local Promenade Uses Task Force.

Even worse, PPS hails from New York City, not Santa Monica, or even Los Angeles.

Whether or not this backlash stems from the decision to reach out beyond the city limits for fresh ideas or the area's underlying rivalry with New York to establish itself as the nation's leader of innovation and cultural precedence is uncertain. I wonder if the reaction would be as heated if PPS called Enid, Oklahoma home or was headquartered in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Whatever the underlying reason, Project for Public Spaces is on board and it's time to get over it. Asking for assistance from beyond our little world in sunny Southern California is neither a sign of weakness nor inadequacy. Since when did asking for a fresh perspective become a negative thing?

"There's nothing wrong with the design of the Promenade," insists vendor Jerry Rubin. "It's clean and well-maintained. What really needs to be redesigned are some of the City leaders' attitudes."

Staring at anything for too long a time gives it a false sense of permanence. How many of us have moved any of our furniture since last New Year's? The more comfortable one becomes, the less apt they are to take chances, akin to an elderly man growing so comfortable in a familiar environment that he fears the challenges change may bring. Maybe we naturally avoid change because it ultimately means more work adapting to new environs.

As each of us grows older and struggles to remain independent, we will likely keep the things around us the same. In this unwavering world we can function. If the arrangement or governing rules were to be altered, we might need help to understand, thus in our own eyes, losing that valued independence. But what we may or may not realize is that the very refusal to adapt is really rendering us a dinosaur; a dinosaur similar to the ones standing

guard along the Third Street Promenade.

"Local residents have a set impression of what (the Promenade) should be and it'll be hard to shake that idea," contends Daniel Franco, a 19-year-old English major at Santa Monica College. "I think outside ideas can be a good thing. It's necessary to get some new blood, shake things up a little."

Asking for help is not a sign of weakness, it is a sign of strength. It is not a sign of insecurity, but rather an indication of self-assuredness.

Albert Einstein said, "the important thing is to not stop asking questions," meaning that we shouldn't simply settle for the answers we already have. Forward thinkers question themselves time and again. Those afraid of what another might say cannot feel too confident in themselves.

The notion that one must live and work in the area to suggest enhancements to the Promenade is ludicrous. Ironically, we need only look at New York for an example on an undoubtedly grander scale. The city on Wednesday unveiled nine new designs for the World Trade Center site in Lower Manhattan. Two of the seven design teams were from that city, five from elsewhere around the world (including the Los Angeles-based firm responsible for the J. Paul Getty Center).

The Big Apple seems to be doing things right, culling ideas from the top architects and designers around the world, while also keeping its finger on the pulse

of the populace. Six original designs unveiled in July were discarded after a huge contingent of New Yorkers deemed them uninspired and unimaginative.

Rebuilding officials in New York indicated this week that incorporating ideas from each of the nine submissions remained a strong possibility, thus taking ideas from all over the world and making them distinctly their own.

It makes me wonder what the reaction on the West Coast might be if New York had said all along that they could rebuild the site on their own, preferring to keep everything local, thus shutting out the rest of the nation who view the city's infamous skyline as a symbol of freedom and capitalism. Under the circumstances, with all that city has been through over the past year and half, it would've been understandable if it were determined to feed into the local economy by tapping a New York City design firm.

Stephen Davies, vice president of PPS, said that the Promenade district was in a strong position to become a more important "destination that can serve both Santa Monica residents and a regional audience." Let's not forget that tourism is a major driving force in the economy of Santa Monica. Why then would we balk at gathering ideas from them on what they'd like to experience?

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

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

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LOCAL



L.A. may pay more than \$8M for sewage releases

RULING, from page 1

prevent further spills.

The judge also is expected to rule later on the city's liability for about 2,000 additional spills since 1998. The 297 spills occurred between July 2001 and July 2002.

They include a spill on Nov. 3, 2001, when a power failure at a wastewater pumping plant caused 205,000 gallons of raw sewage to flow into Ballona Creek, causing the closure of beaches from Santa Monica to Manhattan Beach.

"This is a billion-dollar coastal economy and we need to spend our money on making sure the sewers are improved," Diamond said.

But Adel Hagekhalil, division manager for the Bureau of Sanitation, said the city has already taken steps to reduce spills, with a goal of 25 percent reduction by 2005.

"We're committed to clean water and protecting the public's health and safety," he said. A new ordinance requires restaurants to reduce grease discharge. Grease blockages from restaurants and food processing plants cause the largest number of spills.

The city also is spending about \$700 million on repairs and upgrades to improve capacity on rainy days.

Still, the EPA and water control board said those efforts fall short. They said the city needs to do more to control blockage spills, such as requiring restaurants to capture grease.

With 6,500 miles of sewer pipe, Los Angeles has the largest wastewater collection system in the nation, serving more than 4 million people over 550 square miles.

The city averages 10 spills per 100 miles of sewer per year, more than double the median rate for Southern California cities, according to the EPA. However, Hagekhalil said that's below the national average of 16 spills per 100 miles.

Handshake no substitute for written agreement

GALLERY, from page 1

allows the prospective purchaser to sample the work before committing to buying it. Usually it's a written agreement between the seller and the buyer.

But no agreement existed between gallery owner Patricia Correia and Alcyone, which is why they landed in court. Alcyone maintains that she has bought art on approval from Correia in the past with just a handshake type of understanding. While she acknowledges that, Correia said Alcyone was certain she wanted the three pieces when she was in her gallery in September. So Correia charged Alcyone's American Express card.

But when Alcyone realized they didn't look as good on her wall as they did in the gallery, she tried to return them. Correia refused to give her money back so Alcyone sued her for \$3,897, the cost of the three pieces.

But Commissioner Donna Groman said Alcyone failed to prove her case and ruled in favor of Correia, who had at least twice offered Alcyone a store credit but maintained that the \$3,897 sale was final. Alcyone couldn't produce a formal agreement to prove her case.

"God forbid something terrible happen," said Correia, whose insurance doesn't cover pieces once they've left her gallery. "It's got to be very clear, very clean-cut on paper. This is not something that's done in a haphazard way."

Alcyone said she gave the gallery her husband's American Express credit card so an imprint could be taken, but she didn't think it would actually charge her.

"If you like it, you keep it. If you don't, you bring it back. That's how it's always worked," Alcyone said. "I was flabbergasted (when they wouldn't refund the credit card). We're talking about nearly \$4,000 here. This is not pocket change."

Correia, who compared an approval receipt with the receipt for Alcyone's Sept. 7 purchase, said she offered to loan Alcyone the paintings, but Alcyone didn't

seem interested.

"She left and came back with her friends, and they were all saying 'Buy it, buy it. I know right where it'll go,'" Correia said. "We know the distinction between sales and loans."

But Alcyone said Correia deliberately misled her into believing it was a purchase on approval.

"Approval sales are more common, but they have to be stated before the fact. Once you accept an invoice and pay an invoice, that sale is final."

— MANNY SILVERMAN
Manny Silverman Gallery

"It was like wishful thinking," Alcyone told the court. "She just ran the card and hoped I'd keep it."

When Alcyone asked that the American Express card be credited, Correia refused because the artist had already been paid and American Express had already charged her business a fee on the sales transaction, which is routine under the merchant's agreement.

On her way out of court, Correia again offered Alcyone store credit. But Alcyone refused, saying she intended to sell the pictures. Alcyone did not return calls.

Manny Silverman, who runs Manny Silverman Gallery in Los Angeles, said one of the primary benefits of galleries is that, unlike in an auction, interested parties can sample work before they purchase it.

"Approval sales are more common, but they have to be stated before the fact," said Silverman. "Once you accept an invoice and pay an invoice, that sale is final."

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ENTERTAINMENT

The real life 'Catch Me if You Can' not proud of past

BY SEAN DALY
Special to the Daily Press

NEW YORK CITY — A few years back, two teens from Long Island took out an ad in the New York Post promising the top 10 selling sex videos for \$49.95. No cash or credit cards were accepted — just checks sent to a Post Office box in Summit, New Jersey. Once each payment was deposited into a legal bank account, a letter was generated to the buyer stating: "Unfortunately, we are unable to fulfill your order, so enclosed please find a check to cover your full refund."

The reimbursement checks were real, drawn on a legal account with more than sufficient funds. The catch? Each one came with their company name emblazoned in bold red ink across the top: "Child Pornography Videos, Inc."

Needless to say, few checks were ever cashed.

The scam is one of hundreds investigated by Frank Abagnale, Jr., during his 26 year tenure with the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation. Abagnale, 54, joined the agency's bank fraud unit in 1976 with some rather unique credentials — he was once one of the world's most elusive con men.

From the age of 16 to 21, Abagnale successfully masqueraded as an airline pilot, a district attorney, a college professor and a pediatrician. During that time, he also manufactured and cashed more than \$2.5 million in fraudulent checks.

His story is told in director Steven Spielberg's new movie "Catch Me If You Can," opening Christmas Day. "What I did was wrong, illegal, immoral and unethical," Abagnale says addressing a group of reporters in a Manhattan hotel suite. "I am not proud of it. That's why I rarely talk to the media."

Until today.

In 1980, Abagnale sold the film rights to his escapades for \$250,000.00 and agreed to serve as a consultant on the project should it ever make it to the screen. "Catch Me If You Can" (based largely on the 1980 book co-written by veteran journalist Stan Retting) bounced around from studio to studio for years, once almost being produced with Tom Cruise in the starring role. Spielberg eventually chose Leonardo DiCaprio to portray the notorious young swindler.

"[Frank] was mature beyond his years, a chameleon, able to adapt to his surroundings," boasts DiCaprio, 28, who invited Abagnale to spend several days at his Hollywood estate in preparation for the role. "He has mastered the art of misdirection. Frank is a great actor and the world was his stage."

He's not kidding. At one point, Abagnale was wanted in all 50 US states and 26 foreign countries. Abagnale's adventure began when he ran away from home following the divorce of his parents in 1964. "My parents' divorce was nothing more than the reason I walked away from home," he says. "It's not the reason I broke the law. I have no one to blame for breaking the law but myself."

By adding gray streaks to his hair, and donning a uniform hustled from a laundry facility, Abagnale was able to pass himself off for more than two years as a pilot for Pan Am, permitting him to travel for free and spread his check cashing con

around the globe.

"He was like the Elvis of impersonators," co-star Tom Hanks told Newsweek. "He walks into a room and you think who is that big, trusting looking guy? And it turns out he is the guy who is going to steal your money."

The ruse was exhilarating at first, Abagnale admits: "I was a 16 year-old kid dating 25 year-old women, so obviously there was some joy to all of that."

"He was like the Elvis of impersonators. He walks into a room and you think who is that big, trusting looking guy? And it turns out he is the guy who is going to steal your money."

— TOM HANKS
Actor

Abagnale was eventually nabbed by a tireless FBI agent (loosely portrayed in the film by Hanks) and tossed into a French prison for almost a year before being extradited back to the United States. "My entire youth, from 21 — 26, was spent behind bars," he says, crediting his wife Kelly for eventually helping him turn his life around. They have been married for 26 years and have three sons: Scott, Chris and Sean, ages 18 to 23. Today the Abagnales reside in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where Frank enjoys working in the garden and washing his car in the front driveway.

He travels three to four days a week — ("I have over five million miles on American Airlines") — consulting with private clients such as Discover Card and Standard Register on how to reduce their exposure to fraud, forgery and embezzlement.

For his services, Abagnale earns millions of dollars annually, but continues to maintain a modest lifestyle. "I don't live in a big mansion," he quips. His one splurge: clothing. "I've always liked to dress well. I do believe that presentation is everything. That's why I was a success at 16. That's why I am a success today," he says, sporting a black Brioni suit and a custom made Oxford shirt with his signature on the cuffs.

Abagnale, now completely gray with a receding hairline and thin rimmed glasses, was equally well dressed as he walked the red carpet at the December 16 premiere of "Catch Me If You Can" in Los Angeles. But don't be fooled — "I'm really not looking to become a celebrity again," he insists. "I like to travel around without being noticed."

Why then would Abagnale agree to speak so candidly of his wrongdoings: "I don't want people to think that I am proud of what I did, or walk away with this character being glamorized," he says.

STATE



For sale on eBay: Fixer-upper town in California

BY MICHELLE LOCKE
Associated Press Writer

BRIDGEVILLE — In the still of approaching winter, what used to be the town center of Bridgeville is wrapped in a silence broken only by the sibilant rush of the rain-swollen Van Duzen river.

And yet, amid the bucolic calm, something is stirring as modern as a mouse: point and click, point and click.

A big chunk of Bridgeville is on the electronic chopping block, up for bid on the Internet swap shop of eBay: 80-plus acres, a mile and a half or so of riverbank, four cabins, nine houses, one cemetery and one backhoe.

"Own the entire rustic town of Bridgeville," invites the eBay listing, describing the property as a potential private retreat, money maker or tax shelter.

The auction ends Friday.

Strictly speaking, the area up for sale is more like several large land parcels than a whole town.

The property went up on eBay in November and may be a first, said eBay spokesman Chris Donlay. "We've seen lots of houses and buildings and we've seen land and we've seen bridges, but not a town."

There's not a whole lot of town left in Bridgeville, and what there is is a bit of a fixer-upper. Opinion varies on whether the successful bidder would be getting a money pit or a gold mine.

Behind Northern California's Redwood Curtain and about 260 miles north of San Francisco, the area is rich in scenery. There's a particularly nice spot on the old

bridge, now closed to traffic, that's perfect for elbow-resting and nature-contemplating.

On the other hand, the backhoe — there's a tractor, too — is not just for show. There's work to be done on the plumbing, and the county has deemed some of the houses uninhabitable.

Still, at a bottom-line price of \$775,000 — about the cost of a modest three-bedroom in San Francisco — plenty of people have a dream of what Bridgeville could be.

Postmaster Rose Clarke thinks Bridgeville, a tree-shaded bend in the Van Duzen river, would make a great location for a bed and breakfast. "It's beautiful. It's gorgeous out here, the river and the bridge and it's so quiet."

Rancher Mel Shuman thinks the best plan is to "tear it down, probably."

Ceci Lemieux, who lives in the hills above Bridgeville, isn't crazy about the idea of major development, but she is wistful for the days 20 years or so back when Bridgeville boasted a general store, a cafe and a few other businesses.

"People drive through here in the summer and want to stop — 'Is there any place to get a cold drink and a piece of pie?' — and it's like, 'There always used to be,'" Lemieux laments.

Clarke, Shuman and Lemieux don't live in the area that's up for sale. Few people do — only a handful of the property's houses are rented out.

Among the tenants is Carrie Erickson, who shares a small house with her boyfriend, baby girl, a gentle, blind pit bull and a smallish dog with a penchant for lying in the middle of the road. Erickson knows the place is up for sale and is "just waiting 'til someone buys it and hope we still get to live here."

Bridgeville was founded some years after the Gold Rush, according to a history put together by the Lapple family, the current owners. The town was part of an overland stage route to the seaport of Eureka, now an hour's drive away.

Bridgeville has been on the market a few times before. School principal Mike Mullan, who now has about 60 pupils from the surrounding area, remembers playing poker with friends one night some years ago and dreaming up a plan to buy the town. His idea for a name, inspired by the signs that proliferate in country towns everywhere: Beer, Bait, Ice, Calif.

Portions exempt from the sale include the main roads, which are owned and maintained by the state, including the old bridge, built in 1925 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The bridge was decommissioned when a new one opened nearby in 1997. Until then, traffic on Highway 36 came right through the center of town, driving past the post office, the store and a

small cafe.

These days, only the post office is still going, a homey spot that features a display of blue-ribbon winning ceramics by the local schoolchildren and a couple of bookcases filled with an eclectic selection that serves as an informal lending library.

Logging jobs dried up here decades ago and many area residents are poor. The area is home to ranchers, artistic types drawn by the region's rugged beauty and, according to locals, a thriving marijuana horticulture.

Denise Stuart, the real estate agent who placed the listing, says she's gotten a lot of interest in the property over the years, but no one meeting the asking price, now at \$775,000. After three weeks on the Net, more than 100 anonymous bids had been placed, topping out at just over \$357,000.

The listing was put on eBay in the hopes that it would get more attention than has been generated by ads in more conventional venues, such as newspapers.

Student sues for Picasso allegedly stolen by Nazis

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The grandson of a Jewish woman who fled Germany during World War II has asked a judge to order an art collector to return a Pablo Picasso painting allegedly stolen by Nazis or pay \$10 million to keep it.

Thomas C. Bannigson, a University of California, Berkeley, law student, received a call earlier this year from the Art Loss Register in London, notifying him that the painting had been located, attorney E. Randol Schoenberg said.

The 1922 Picasso painting, known as "Femme en blanc" or "Femme assise," was found in a Los Angeles art gallery, where it was up for sale. The painting has since returned to owner Marilyn Alsdorf in Chicago without being sold.

Schoenberg said a new state law extends the statute of limitations for all claims against museums and galleries over Nazi-looted artworks to Dec. 31, 2010.

A hearing in the case was scheduled for Tuesday.

Alsdorf's attorney, David M. Rownd, said his client "certainly had no indication of anything alleged in the complaint."

Alsdorf's late husband, James, bought the painting from the Stephen Hahn Gallery in New York in 1975 for \$357,000, according to a court declaration filed by Sarah Jackson, the historic claims director at the Art Loss Register.

Jackson said the register — the world's largest private international database of lost and stolen art, antiques and collectibles — was asked to investigate the painting for a French art dealer and discovered it had been stolen.

Before Bannigson's grandmother escaped Nazi Germany, she sent the painting to J.K. Thannhauser, a well-known Parisian art dealer for safekeeping.

But Nazis looted the painting and other valuables in 1940, according to a 1958 letter from Thannhauser.

Bannigson said in his declaration that his grandmother, who died in 1994, "made reasonable efforts to locate the painting after it was taken by the Nazis ... but (he) did not discover the whereabouts of the painting until 2002."



briefs

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STATE

Prosecutors close criminal case on Global Crossing

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Federal prosecutors have decided not to file criminal charges against Global Crossing Ltd., Chairman Gary Winnick or any of its other executives over the company's aggressive accounting practices, a newspaper reported Tuesday.

The U.S. attorney's office in Los Angeles lacked enough evidence to show that executives at the telecommunications company had misallocated costs or had obstructed justice by shredding sensitive documents, according to the Los Angeles Times. The newspaper quoted anonymous sources close to the investigation.

"While there was a great deal of smoke, prosecutors obviously concluded the evidence was not sufficient to bring a case," said Robert Mintz, a former federal prosecutor in Newark, N.J., who has tracked the Global Crossing situation. "These cases, from the outset, are extremely difficult to make because they often fall into gray areas where overt criminality is difficult to find."

A Global Crossing spokeswoman declined comment on the report, and a call to the U.S. Attorney's Office in Los Angeles was not immediately returned.

Launched in 1997, Global Crossing

spent \$15 billion building the world's most extensive fiber-optic network. But with the economic slowdown, it cut thousands of jobs, closed 71 offices and saw its stock fall from a high of more than \$60 a share to 30 cents before its bankruptcy filing in January.

The company claimed \$22.4 billion in assets when it filed for bankruptcy. Investors and company employees whose retirement savings were invested in company stock lost billions of dollars in the collapse.

The end of the criminal investigation doesn't halt an inquiry by the Securities and Exchange Commission or ongoing civil litigation by investors.

"It doesn't affect our case," said Sidney S. Lieberman, whose Delaware law firm is lead counsel in about five dozen securities fraud class actions that have been consolidated for trial in federal court in New York.

The criminal investigation was launched on the strength of allegations from Roy Olofson, a former Global Crossing vice president of finance. He told a House Energy and Commerce subcommittee in September that the company entered into more than a dozen deals in early 2001 designed to overstate revenue and make the company appear financially sound.

Man arrested for performing unlicensed surgeries at home

By The Associated Press

SANTA CLARITA — A man who allegedly performed female circumcisions and other illegal body alterations at his home was arrested for investigation of practicing medicine without a license.

Todd Cameron Bertrang, 40, of Santa Clarita allegedly performed dozens of illegal and disfiguring medical procedures since 1997, including clitoridectomies and penile piercings, Medical Board of California investigators said Monday. The board is responsible for licensing and regulating physicians.

"Your typical piercing doesn't rise to the level of practicing medicine, which requires a license," said John Hirai, supervising investigator for the agency. "In this case, Bertrang did procedures on people that altered their body beyond a typical

piercing."

The victims, who were mostly in their 20s, sought out Bertrang to perform a variety of "body modifications," Hirai said. Bertrang detailed those practices on a Web site.

Earlier this year, the site caught the attention of a doctor who reported to the medical board that Bertrang was performing clitoridectomies on women in Southern California. The agency launched an investigation under a unit known as Operation Safe Medicine.

The FBI, which had also received a complaint about Bertrang, had opened its own probe about the same time.

"I've been with the medical board a long time, and I can't remember a case like this," agency spokesman David Thorton said.

Britney Spears sues Skechers over skates marketing deal

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Pop star Britney Spears sued Skechers for breach of agreement Monday, claiming the shoemaker failed to adequately pay her for marketing a line of roller skates and accessories.

The \$1.5 million federal lawsuit claims the company failed to find outside businesses to manufacture accessories for the line. Instead, Skechers used the singer's presence in advertisements to increase sales of its own similar skate products, according to the lawsuit.

As a result, Spears was not paid expected bonuses for sales of her line, the suit said. The action also claims that ads featuring Spears ran before skates from her collection were available, causing customers to buy Skechers' skates instead.

Skechers officials could not be reached for comment Monday night. A call placed after business hours to the company's Manhattan Beach headquarters rang unanswered.

NATIONAL



Residents, businesses help cash-strapped school district

BY COLLEEN LONG
Associated Press Writer

LONGMONT, Colo. — Parents are offering to help pay grocery and utility bills. Businesses are donating cash and a group of students run an informational Web site.

In communities just north of Denver, residents are pitching in to help teachers and administrators as the St. Vrain Valley School District grapples with a \$13.8 million budget shortfall blamed on mismanagement.

"We're worried about our teachers and our principals, and we really don't want to lose them because of this," parent Merrill Bohanning, 44, said. "If we can help ease their financial burden, we will."

Teachers are grateful, but know it may be years before the district is solvent.

"Teachers feel really good about the parent support," said Jeannie Beyer, spokeswoman for the St. Vrain Valley Education Association. "But they realize it's not going to be possible for them to solve this problem."

The 22,000-student district in parts of Weld, Boulder and Larimer counties discovered the shortfall last month. The finance director resigned and an assistant superintendent has been suspended. District officials said an independent audit showed the two mismanaged the budget but did not commit fraud.

"It's extraordinary. Nobody would have ever imagined something happening like this at this level," said State Treasurer Mike Coffman. "I think the state needs to learn from this."

Coffman and district officials last week agreed on a state bailout plan freeing up a \$9.8 million loan that enabled the payroll to be met for 2,700 teachers and staff in time for the holidays.

The plan calls for all district employees to take a 7.1 percent pay cut beginning Jan. 1 and a hiring freeze through June 2004. Administrators who used to pay \$1 a month for family health insurance now will pay \$1 for themselves and the regular premium for the rest of their families.

District officials also took \$1.7 million from student-activity accounts in its 38 schools.

"It's extraordinary. Nobody would have ever imagined something happening like this at this level."

— MIKE COFFMAN
Colorado state treasurer

At Coffman's request, the Boulder District Attorney has begun investigating the district's finances. Coffman has said he wants to know whether district officials hid the budget shortfall until after the November election, when voters approved a \$212 million bond issue for schools.

C-SPAN to broadcast Clinton course

BY BRIAN SKOLOFF
Associated Press Writer

LITTLE ROCK — Next semester the whole country can get a lesson in Bill Clinton.

The C-SPAN public affairs cable network will broadcast every class of "The Clinton Presidency," a new course at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock that will examine the former president's achievements and scandals.

Guest lecturers will include longtime Clinton lawyer David Kendall, Clinton confidant and counsel Bruce Lindsey, former NATO commander Wesley Clark and the former president himself. Clinton critics, including former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, also have been

invited. In Frederick about 30 miles northeast of Denver, Bohanning and other parents of students at Prairie Ridge Elementary School are buying classroom supplies and offering to pay for groceries and utility bills to keep first-year teachers and principals in their jobs.

Some \$36,000 have been raised in donations from Safeway. A Chevrolet dealership chipped in \$10,000 and forgave the district's \$10,750 bill for renting the driver education cars. IBM chipped in 4,500 reams of paper.

"We employ thousands of people in this community," said Mitch Carson, a hospital chief executive officer, who helped raise funds. "We have children in the schools, and we see how they could be affected."

At Silver Creek Middle-Senior High School, three juniors started a Web site called <http://www.poorsschool.com> that displays newspaper articles, district information and an e-mail forum.

"Rumors about what is happening to the district are moving at lightning speed," site co-creator Mitch Lubbers, 17, said. "We wanted to know the truth, and spread that around instead."

invited.

"The nation continues to be obsessed with the Clinton years," said political science professor Margaret Scranton, who will teach the course. "But the tabloid times are past ... In the classroom, our job is to reflect on the deeper meaning and the perspective that time can give us."

An agreement between C-SPAN and the university was reached last week, Scranton said.

The course, which begins Jan. 16, will examine Clinton's impeachment, his campaign style and his rise from a Southern governor to a political powerhouse, as well as issues such as foreign policy, health care and the economy.



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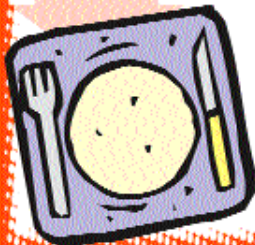
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**NATIONAL**

Community takes a stand against racist organization

BY SARAH COOKE
Associated Press Writer

RIVERTON, Wyo. — The people of Riverton abruptly dropped their typically Wyoming you-do-your-thing-I'll-do-mine philosophy two weeks ago when a white supremacist organization announced plans to move its world headquarters here from Illinois.

The community was outraged. An unprecedented number of letters poured in to local newspapers, and talk radio shows were flooded with calls about the World Church of the Creator.

Many wondered, what have we done to deserve this?

"People here don't think the way they do," said John Vincent, mayor-elect of this town of 10,000 people 275 miles northwest of Cheyenne. "People are not filled with hate. People are not racist."

Community leaders formed a task force. Residents signed a pledge of tolerance printed in newspapers. Some started petition drives. And there has been talk of holding protests and displaying "No Hate" signs in home and store windows in hopes the organization will get the hint and leave.

"If ever there was something where you need to take a stand, this is an issue that begs for that," said Tim Wilson, a rancher who lives in nearby Lander. "This isn't Joe-Bob Danny and his fascist friends. These guys are pretty serious."

Founded in 1973, the World Church of the Creator received national attention in 1999 when former member Benjamin Smith went on a shooting rampage against minorities in Illinois and Indiana, killing two people and wounding several others before killing himself. The East Peoria, Ill., group, whose membership numbers could reach into the thousands, has also been linked to a plot to blow up black and Jewish landmarks in Boston and Washington this year.

On Dec. 6, the organization's leader, the Rev. Matt Hale, announced he would hand day-to-day operations over to the Rev. Thomas Kroenke, a Wyoming Corrections Department employee who lives in Riverton. Kroenke did not respond to e-mails requesting an interview. His telephone number is unlisted

and no one answered the door at his home last week.

The new headquarters consist of Kroenke's house. It is not clear whether the organization plans to build or rent larger quarters.

Fremont County's population of 36,000 is 77 percent white and 20 percent Indian. According to census figures, there are 44 blacks.

The announcement from the white supremacists came on the heels of another controversy involving a rancher with ties to the World Church of the Creator. Rudy Stanko, who once called himself the organization's Pontifus Maximus before Hale took over, asked county commissioners this fall for permission to kill all gray wolves and grizzly bears on his son's grazing allotments. He claimed the animals were killing cattle.

The commission has not acted on the request, and some commissioners have accused Stanko of lying about the land's location.

Some residents wonder if the church's move is somehow related.

"I don't think they threw a dart on a map of the United States and ended up in Riverton," Wilson said.

Hale said the group's move had nothing to do with Stanko. He attributed the move partly to a trademark lawsuit unfolding in Illinois, where a federal judge recently ordered the group to stop using its name and turn over all printed materials reading "World Church of the Creator" because the name is too similar to that of a group in Oregon.

Hale has refused to comply and is scheduled to appear in court Jan. 8 to face a contempt charge. He has told members via e-mail, "Our materials are now safe in Wyoming."

As for the move west, Hale told residents worried about violence to calm down.

"Really, the other races are not our concern," he said. "We're not trying to intimidate them or trying to cause them problems, per se. What we're trying to do is liberate white people."

The organization has caused dread in Fremont County and the surrounding Wind River Indian Reservation, home of the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho tribes.

City worker accused of stealing more than \$1.2M

By The Associated Press

BURLINGTON, Ky. — A city finance director was accused of embezzling more than \$1.2 million to support his estranged wife and his girlfriend.

The 18 felony charges against Ronald J. Epling cover alleged thefts since January. Prosecutors told a judge Monday that they believe he had been stealing from the Cincinnati suburb of Florence since he was hired 15 years ago.

Irregularities involving city funds were discovered during an annual audit earlier this month.

"We have no idea where all the money went ... or how much is missing," prosecutor Linda Tally Smith told county District Judge Charles Moore. "It is a lot of money. Money going into accounts, and money

going out of accounts just as quickly."

Smith said Epling, who earned \$69,000 a year, paid for a \$650,000 home for his estranged wife and a \$200,000 home he shared with his girlfriend, as well as two condominiums and two homes.

Epling, 51, was suspended from his job without pay and was being held in lieu of \$1 million cash bond. He pleaded innocent to the first charge filed and hasn't entered pleas on the other 17. He faced a maximum sentence of 20 years if convicted on all counts.

Kentucky State Police detective Don Mullikin testified at a preliminary hearing Monday that Epling confessed to the thefts and estimated the amount at \$1 million to \$2 million.

Epling, wearing county jail stripes, said nothing during the hearing.

INTERNATIONAL



South Korean president-elect appeals for peaceful resolution

BY PAUL SHIN
Associated Press Writer

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea's president-elect appealed to Russia, China and Japan on Tuesday to help find a peaceful solution to a nuclear dispute with North Korea, as the U.N. nuclear watchdog said the North had begun repairing a nuclear reactor.

The Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency's chief spokesman, Mark Gwozdecky, said North Korea will need "a month or two" to make its 5-megawatt reactor at Yongbyon operational.

Meanwhile, North Korea issued another dire warning Tuesday, saying Washington's hostile policy toward it would backfire and result in "an uncontrollable catastrophe." The statement by the North's communist party organ, Rodong Sinmun, was carried by the foreign news outlet Korean Central News Agency.

The North's defense minister, Kim Il Chul, said in a separate KCNA report that "U.S. hawks" were escalating the situation to "an extremely dangerous phase."

White House spokesman Sean McCormack had no direct comment on the new warning from North Korea on Tuesday.

"We've made very clear we want a peaceful resolution to the situation North Korea has created by pursuing a covert nuclear weapons program, and as the president has said before, we have no intention of invading North Korea," he said.

Earlier Tuesday, a South Korean Foreign Ministry official said the communist nation might be preparing to reactivate the facility.

The official also said North Korean technicians had removed U.N. seals and cameras from a fourth nuclear facility, a plant that makes fuel rods. The only nuclear facil-

ities that remain untouched are two unfinished reactors.

Over the weekend, North Korea began removing the U.N. seals and surveillance cameras from three Soviet-designed nuclear facilities that could yield weapons within months.

Of particular concern is the reopening of a storage area holding 8,000 spent fuel rods that contain enough weapons-grade plutonium to make several atomic bombs. Gwozdecky said it did not appear that the North

"The president-elect requested cooperation from those concerned countries to help resolve the North's nuclear issue peacefully."

— LEE NAK-HYUN
Roh Moo-hyun spokesman

Koreans had removed the rods from the facility.

U.S. officials suspect that North already has one or two atomic bombs.

Roh Moo-hyun, who won South Korea's presidential vote last week, met with the ambassadors from Japan, Russian and China on Tuesday to discuss the nuclear crisis.

"The president-elect requested cooperation from those concerned countries to help resolve the North's nuclear issue peacefully," said Roh's spokesman, Lee Nak-hyun.

Lee said the ambassadors — Teymuraz Ramishvili from Russia, Li Bin from China and Terusuke Terada from Japan — all hoped that the nuclear issue would be resolved peacefully. Their governments already have

expressed support for a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula.

In a separate meeting, Foreign Minister Choi Sung-hong briefed the president-elect on the latest international developments in nuclear tensions with the North, the spokesman said.

Roh takes office in February. He advocates dialogue to resolve nuclear issues with the North, while the United States rules out any talks before the communist state gives up its nuclear ambitions.

Britain's Foreign Office minister Bill Rammell said North Korea's moves to restart its suspended nuclear program were "very worrying."

"I think it is probably a fairly ham-fisted attempt to gain international leverage, but our best analysis at the moment is that this is not a regime that is hell-bent on confrontation," he told British Broadcasting Corp. radio.

The North's latest moves raised fears of a crisis on the Korean Peninsula similar to one involving the same facilities in 1994, when there was a heightened possibility of war with North Korea.

Conflict was averted when North Korea agreed to freeze the facilities in a deal with the United States. But Pyongyang said on Dec. 12 that it planned to reactivate them to produce electricity because Washington had failed on a pledge to provide fuel oil for needed energy.

The United States, which is preparing for a possible war against Iraq, says it wants a peaceful solution to the nuclear problem. But Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld warned Monday that the U.S. military could simultaneously take on both Iraq and North Korea.

"We're capable of winning decisively in one and swiftly defeating in the case of the other, and let there be no doubt about it," Rumsfeld said.

Rumsfeld said, however, that no military action against North Korea was imminent.

Iraq is willing to talk with U.N. about its weapons declaration

BY NADIA ABOU EL MAGD
Associated Press Writer

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Iraq is prepared to talk to top U.N. inspectors about their criticism of Baghdad's 12,000-page arms declaration, but it has nothing new to add, Iraq's chief representative to the U.N. mission said Tuesday.

In an exclusive interview, Gen. Hossam Mohammed Amin said he saw nothing to justify the criticisms expressed last week by chief U.N. inspector Hans Blix and Mohamed ElBaradei, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Meanwhile, teams of U.N. and IAEA inspectors visited nine sites on Tuesday looking for weapons of mass destruction, according to the Iraqi Information Ministry. Among the sites was the Hateen Company, a complex of factories 45 miles south of Baghdad that produces artillery ammunition, among other things.

Last week, Blix and ElBaradei said the declaration that Iraq presented earlier this month was largely a rehash of old information, and that they would be seeking more data from Iraq.

"An opportunity was missed in the declaration to give a lot of evidence," Blix told reporters after reporting to the U.N. Security Council. The declaration, which was required by council Resolution 1441, was supposed to be a comprehensive account of Iraq's nuclear, biological and chemical weapons as well as long-range missiles, and the programs to produce them.

Amin said his government was "willing to reach an understanding" with Blix and ElBaradei, but "we have nothing to add, really, of new information, because the information we gave is the real and complete information."

"We know very well, and they know very well, that we have no weapons of mass destruction."

The United States has said the declaration is so inadequate that it amounts to a "material breach" of the council resolution. Britain has said the declaration is a lie. The two Western allies have threatened to invade Iraq unless it cooperates fully with the U.N. inspection commission and eliminates its weapons of mass destruction.

Amin said his government would not threaten any

Iraqi scientist who accepts an invitation from the inspectors to leave the country for further interviews about Iraq's weapons programs.

"We know very well, and they know very well, that we have no weapons of mass destruction."

— GEN. HOSSAM MOHAMMED AMIN
Iraqi U.N. delegation representative

Resolution 1441 gives the inspectors the right to interview scientists outside Iraq, with their families accompanying them abroad, so as to reduce the chance that they may come under pressure from the Baghdad government.

Amin said the inspectors had been interviewing Iraqi scientists for about 10 days, and his government saw no need to take them abroad.

"We see no necessity for that. In fact, this is not our opinion only. It is the opinion of Blix and ElBaradei too. They said they do not see any necessity to interview the scientists outside Iraq."

"This subject is related to the person's right to choose. No one can force him — neither the Iraqi government, nor the others to leave his country. I have no comment on this, but we will not punish anyone."

An Iraqi scientist recently interviewed by U.N. inspectors in Baghdad, Sabah Abdel-Nour, told reporters on Tuesday that he had turned down an offer for a private discussion, preferring instead to have Iraqi officials present during the meeting.

"The interview (with the inspectors) ... was very objective, the discussion was very friendly and the questions were mainly about what has been done or any progress which has been achieved in Iraq since 1998," according to Abdel-Nour, who said he was a former member of Iraq's nuclear program.

"I explained to them all that I know and that we do not have anything to hide," said Abdel-Nour, who currently teaches at Baghdad's University of Technology. He did not elaborate.

Sharon accuses Iraq of transferring banned weapons to neighboring Syria

BY MARK LAVIE
Associated Press Writer

JERUSALEM — Iraq may be transferring chemical and biological weapons to Syria, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said in a TV interview on Tuesday.

Sharon said that Israel has information that "weapons he (Saddam Hussein) wanted to hide, chemical weapons, biological weapons, were indeed transferred to Syria."

He said that the information has not been fully verified. "We have some information to that effect. We are now working to confirm the information," he told Israel TV's Channel 2 in an excerpt of a program broadcast on

the nightly news.

In the excerpt, Sharon did not indicate where the information came from or what form it took.

Israel has been preparing for the possibility of Iraqi retaliation in case of a U.S.-led assault against Iraq. During the 1991 Gulf war, Iraq fired 39 Scud missiles at Israel, causing considerable damage but few casualties.

Israel has vaccinated emergency and rescue workers against smallpox, concerned that Iraq might use the disease in a biological attack. Almost every day, the military's Home Front Command carries out widely publicized drills to practice dealing with missile attacks of various kinds.

DID YOU KNOW?: Half the world's population earns about 5% of the world's wealth.



SPORTS

Contreras agrees to \$32M, four-year contract

BY RONALD BLUM
AP Sports Writer

NEW YORK — The New York Yankees beat the Boston Red Sox in the race to sign Cuban defector Jose Contreras, reaching a preliminary agreement Tuesday with the right-hander.

While terms were not announced, Contreras agreed to a deal worth \$32 million over four years, a baseball official said on the condition he not be identified.

"For me, it's an honor to play for the Yankees," Contreras said in San Fernando de Masaya, about 20 miles from the Nicaraguan capital of Managua. "I really sacrificed some money to play for the Yankees, but for me they were the team I wanted to be with."

The agreement, the largest for a Cuban defector, is subject to Contreras passing a physical and regulatory procedures dealing with Cuban defectors and the U.S. economic boycott of the communist nation.

"Jose Contreras is most certainly the premier amateur pitcher in the world and may be the best pitcher ever in amateur play," said Gordon Blakeley, the Yankees' vice president of international and professional scouting. "He has an exceptional fastball and breaking ball, plus a championship makeup, and we expect him to have great success at the major league level."

Contreras, said to be 31, was the top pitcher on Cuba's national team until he defected in October, and beat the United States on one day's rest in the championship of the 1999 Pan American Games, striking out 13 in eight innings.

He called his family in Cuba to tell them he had signed with the Yankees. He said he told them playing in the big leagues would be no different from pitching against tough competition in his homeland.

"I assured them it would be the same as always," he said.

He became the second major international signing for the Yankees in six days, following Japanese slugger Hideki Matsui, who agreed to a \$21 million, three-year deal last week.

After gaining residency in Nicaragua, Contreras was declared a free agent last week by the commissioner's office. Monday was the first day he could negotiate with major league teams.

New York had dispatched Blakeley to Nicaragua along with Carlos Rios, its coordinator of Latin American

scouting.

Boston sent general manager Theo Epstein and Louie Eljau, its director of international scouting. Los Angeles and Seattle also were believed to be interested in signing Contreras.

Contreras left the Cuban team after an Oct. 1 game against the Dominican Republic at Saltillo, Mexico. He entered the United States at San Ysidro, Calif., and was detained by the Immigration and Naturalization Service in San Diego.

He was freed and went to Florida, then left the United States, where he would have been subject to baseball's amateur draft.

Contreras pitched for Cuba's national team for seven years, pitching in the 1999 Pan American Games, the 2000 Sydney Olympics and the 2001 World Cup. He was

117-50 with a 2.82 ERA in the Cuban League, according to the Yankees.

His deal calls for a \$6 million signing bonus, with \$2 million payable in each of the first two years and \$1 million in each of the final two years, and annual salaries of \$4 million, \$7 million, \$7 million and \$8 million.

His signing gives the Yankees seven starting pitchers, a group that also includes Andy Pettitte, Mike Mussina, David Wells, Orlando Hernandez, Jeff Weaver and Sterling Hitchcock.

New York is close to re-signing Roger Clemens to a one-year deal in the \$8 million to \$10 million range, with the sides negotiating performance bonuses and structural issues. Both sides have said they are confident an agreement will be reached by the Jan. 8 deadline for Clemens to re-sign.

Alabama is more than a football school

BY JOHN ZENOR
AP Sports Writer

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. — The football team lost to Auburn. The basketball team kept winning.

The football coach left. The basketball team kept winning.

Through it all, Alabama basketball was bumped off the front pages by — surprise — Alabama football.

But here's the twist: For the first time, the Crimson Tide is No. 1 in The Associated Press rankings — in basketball. True story.

"I think it's great because every one of us came into this program knowing it's a football school," senior center Kenny Walker said. "Our No. 1 goal is to change that. It's getting to the point where everyone thinks this is a football school and a basketball school."

Winning changes perception. After all, even the football team hasn't been No. 1 since the end of the 1992 season, when it captured its sixth national championship.

Coach Mark Gottfried needed just four years to raise his alma mater from basketball mediocrity to Southeastern Conference champions. The Tide broke that drought last year, winning its first league title since Gottfried was a senior guard on the 1987 championship team.

Apparently, he was just getting warmed up. The Tide began this season at No. 8, quickly rose five spots to match its highest ranking and spent two weeks behind Arizona at No. 2.

Hardly anyone seemed to notice deep in football country, not with the beloved football program in turmoil. The NCAA, citing illegal recruiting by boosters, banned Alabama from bowls for two years, imposed a five-year probation and reduced scholarships.

Latecomers had no problems finding seats in Coleman Coliseum, where Alabama has won a school-record 25 straight. The Tide's biggest crowds have come in the past two games, but the 15,316-seat arena has still only been about two-thirds full.

"I covered it 40 years for The Birmingham News and it was not a basketball state when I came there, and it still isn't and I don't think it ever will be," said Clyde Bolton, a retired columnist and sports editor.

"It used to be you could count on two sellouts: when Pete Maravich came around and when Kentucky came around."

Gottfried was well aware of the history, and the past few weeks have been a reminder that things haven't changed all that much. The Tide is No. 1 in the nation, No. 2 on campus.

The departure of football coach Dennis Franchione, the search for a replacement and the hiring of Mike Price drowned out any hoops hoopla.

"I never really made an issue of it," Gottfried said. "Football is powerful in the southeastern part of the country. You're never going to change that, and I don't want to change it."

"At the end of the day, if we're playing really good people will appreciate it. Sometimes it takes until after

January, but that's just part of the South."

This time it took only until mid-December. Is Alabama becoming of all things a basketball school?

"You tell me," senior guard Terrance Meade said. "Football will always be No. 1 here, but we're going to continue playing. The fans are starting to come. We're just going to continue playing. That's about all we can do."

Jim Farmer, Gottfried's former Alabama roommate and teammate, has been watching the basketball team thrive amid the football program's NCAA sanctions and coaching unrest.

"I think it's great because every one of us came into this program knowing it's a football school. Our No. 1 goal is to change that."

— KENNY WALKER
Senior center

"(Gottfried) wants to bring Alabama basketball as close as you can get to being as successful and having kind of tradition they've had in football," Farmer said. "He's on the way to doing that, but he also understands Alabama football's first. Like at Kentucky and Duke, basketball's first."

Farmer played on three straight 20-win teams at Alabama under Wimp Sanderson from 1985-87, the Tide's last basketball heyday. He and Gottfried helped propel the 1987 group to a 28-5 record and regular-season and SEC tournament titles.

"I see a certain swagger with these guys that I don't think I've ever seen with an Alabama basketball team," he said. "And I like to think our senior team was one of the best."

"But I don't think we truly believed in the end we could win a national championship. With this team, nothing really rattles them. They know have the ability to overcome and win it."

In addition, the team's two top recruits — Kennedy Winston and Lucky Williams — are still waiting to be cleared to play by the NCAA because of eligibility questions unrelated to Alabama.

Gottfried said from the outset he wanted to lead Alabama basketball to a national championship. As an assistant on Jim Harlick's UCLA team that won the 1995 title, he knows what it takes.

Of course, being No. 1 in basketball at John Wooden U. is different from being No. 1 in Bear Bryant country.

"At UCLA, it was ho-hum, no big deal," Gottfried said. "You have to remember Alabama's never been on top."

Raiders kicker gets probation for DUI

By The Associated Press

OAKLAND — Oakland Raiders place-kicker Sebastian Janikowski pleaded no contest Monday to a misdemeanor charge of drunken driving.

Under the terms of the plea, Janikowski will be placed on three years probation. He was also fined \$1,292 and ordered to perform community service and enroll in a DUI school.

Janikowski was cited Oct. 1 by a highway patrol officer who pulled him over on Interstate 580 in Oakland. He was not in court — his lawyer, Laurel Headley, entered the plea.

A test later showed he had a blood-alcohol level of .20, well above the state's legal limit of .08.

It wasn't the Polish-born kicker's first brush with the law.

In April 2001, Janikowski was acquitted on charges of possessing GHB, the "date-rape" drug. In June 2000, he was acquitted on a charge that he offered a Tallahassee, Fla., police officer \$300 to release his roommate after an argument with a bouncer who wouldn't let him into a nightclub.

DID YOU KNOW?: The oldest continuous trophy in sports is the America's Cup. It started in 1851, with Americans winning for a straight 132 years until Australia took the Cup in 1983.

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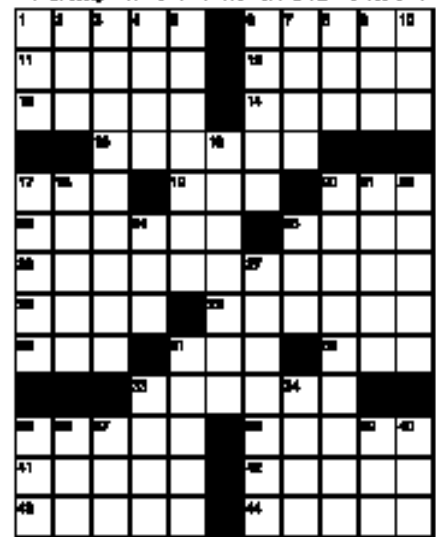
- ACROSS**
- Pilgrim's goal
 - Refuge
 - To any extent
 - Cry from the audience
 - Various sight
 - Home opera
 - Bury
 - Sandy sound
 - Sphere
 - Porch sight
 - Defense
 - Heap
 - Discus, javelin, etc.
 - Just
 - Do over
 - Fishing aid
 - Evergreen tree
 - Saunt
 - Haustrings, to Polrot
 - Ferber book
 - Reunion attendee
 - By the way
 - Holdup
 - Substantial
 - Conductor Previn
- DOWN**
- Buddy
 - Timetable abbr.
 - Sugar source
 - Highland group
 - Everything considered
 - Mushroom maker
 - Mideast native
 - Dyeing place
 - Time of preparation
 - And not
 - Get Chinese, maybe
 - Concerning
 - Horned beast
 - Coin
 - Dangerous place to walk
 - Church part
 - Irritable
 - Actor Ron
 - Vitality
 - Rooted porch
 - Murky
 - Coin producer
 - Bearing
 - "Chips" barkkeep
 - Bullfight call
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Yesterday's answer

- Horned beast
- Coin
- Dangerous place to walk
- Church part
- Irritable
- Actor Ron
- Vitality
- Rooted porch
- Murky
- Coin producer
- Bearing
- "Chips" barkkeep
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NEWS OF THE WEIRD by Chuck Shepard

Man runs cell phone scam while in prison

James Sabatino, already serving time in a Putnam County (N.Y.) prison for attacking a federal officer and having recently served time in England for a telephone-based scam, had his telephone privileges removed because Putnam officials said he spent almost eight hours a day on prison phones, for five months, before they caught him in another scam. According to officials cited by the New York Post in November, Sabatino called phone companies and convinced them he was doing movie shoots and needed dozens of cell phones quickly (and was able to order about a thousand activated phones, delivered to places arranged by his girlfriend, without spending a penny).

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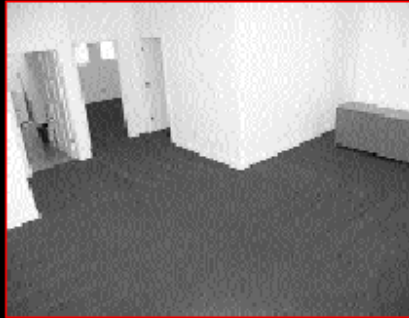
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SANTA MONICA SCENE °CALENDAR EDITION

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 26, 2002

THURSDAY

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

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

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

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

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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. **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. **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. **Die Another Day** (PG-13) 10:25, 1:20, 4:25, 7:25. **Drumline** (PG-13) 11:25, 2:10, 5:00, 7:40. **Maid in Manhattan** (PG-13) 11:45, 2:30, 5:15, 7:45. **Star Trek: Nemesis** with Captions (PG-13) 11:15, 2:00, 4:50, 7:35. **The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers** (PG-13) 11:15, 12:00, 3:00, 4:00, 6:45, 8:00.

LANDMARK NU-WILSHIRE

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

LAEMMLE MONICA

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

AERO THEATRE

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



BACK PAGE

Study: December is prime time for teens to lose virginity

BY MARTHA IRVINE

AP National Writer

School's out for the holidays. Teens have got time on their hands — and perhaps even a crackling fire to set the mood. What are they planning for vacation?

Apparently, their virginity is high on the list for those with significant others, according to researchers who reviewed data from a federal health survey.

While June is the most common month for teens to have sex for the first time — be it in a casual summer fling or steady relationship — sociologists from Mississippi State University say many teens who are dating seriously choose December as the time to have sex for the first time.

In fact, their findings have led them to predict that teens with romantic partners are nearly three times more likely to make their sexual debut in December than those dating casually.

The accent on romance has led them to conclude that the holiday season — and all the mushiness that surrounds it — plays a key role.

"We call it the 'Santa Claus effect,'" says Martin Levin, lead author of the study, which is published in the current issue of the *Journal of Marriage and Family*.

The data was drawn from the ongoing National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health and the responses of nearly 21,000 teens, as young as seventh-graders, collected in the mid-1990s (the most current data of its kind in the survey). The Mississippi State researchers cross-referenced the month teens said they lost their virginity with responses to questions about the seriousness of their relationships with sexual partners.

In this case, they defined losing virginity as sexual intercourse for the first time between a boy and girl.

The findings ring true to Becky Rose, a 19-year-old student at New York University.

"I'd say we're all fairly vulnerable and needy, and need someone to cling to and love," she says, laughing. She says it's partly the stress of final exams, followed

by the holidays that make her "more emotional" during the holidays. And there's the importance society and families place on relationships.

"Everything you see on TV has people kissing under mistletoe and 'Buy her a diamond — she'll love you!'" says Rose, who concedes that her summertime relationships have been of a more casual nature.

Many experts agree that the holidays have a way of bolstering physical closeness, "whether it's under a mistletoe or in the sack," says Yvonne K. Fulbright, a sex columnist for the student newspaper at NYU.

But she wonders if other factors are at play, too. "With peer influence still being a big factor in sexual initiation, if one's chums are getting it on during the holidays, it is likely that a teen will want to, too," says Fulbright, a doctoral student in health studies with a master's degree in human sexuality.

Dr. Mark Schuster calls the Mississippi State researchers' findings "a very useful window into seasonal variation in first sexual intercourse."

"For some people, there's something romantic about snow on the ground and cuddling up by the fire," says Schuster, a pediatrician who studies teens and sexual

behavior at the UCLA/RAND Center for Adolescent Health Promotion in Los Angeles.

He notes that teens are often less supervised during the holidays, since parents are "often running around buying gifts."

Meanwhile, says Dr. Lynn Ponton, teens generally have more time on their hands.

"This is about kids having sex when they're not worried about school and work and other things," says Ponton, a professor of psychiatry at the University of California at San Francisco and author of the book "The Sex Lives of Teenagers."

Still, she and the others believe teens also romanticize the holidays. Even as a teen herself in the 1960s, Ponton remembers having sex in her parents' living room, next to the Christmas tree. For her, the "forbidden aspect" was the allure.

In a separate 2001 survey, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that nearly 46 percent of high school students said they've had sexual intercourse.

To fully understand what's behind the December teen sex phenomenon, the Mississippi State researchers plan more studies.

Man sings his way out of a traffic ticket

By The Associated Press

COLUMBIA, Tenn. — Clifford Jones thought he'd be paying up when he went to traffic court last week.

Instead, he sang his way out of a fine. He was among about 55 traffic violators who were given the opportunity to avoid a ticket by caroling.

"I'm a little shy, but not about saving a dollar. It was a pretty good Christmas present," said Jones, who sang "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer."

City Judge Tom DuBois followed a three-year tradition on the last court date before Christmas. Violators who sang a carol and donated five canned goods to the

Harvest Food Share had their tickets dismissed with no points put on their driving record.

"This is a good day to come to court," police officer Kenneth Lovet told the group. "I hope you like to sing."

Fines and court costs were waived in cases of speeding and running stop signs. Some violations were still assessed, including seat belt violations or child safety restrictions.

Donald Hatler, who sang "Jingle Bells," didn't expect the early Christmas gift.

"It was a little embarrassing," Hatler said. "I don't have the best singing voice in the world, but it was worth it."

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