FREE

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Santa Monica Daily Press

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SM election process will go to voters

County officials confirm group has enough signatures for ballot

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON
Daily Press Staff Writer

It was confirmed last week that Santa Monica voters will be able to change the way people are elected into office, if they so choose.

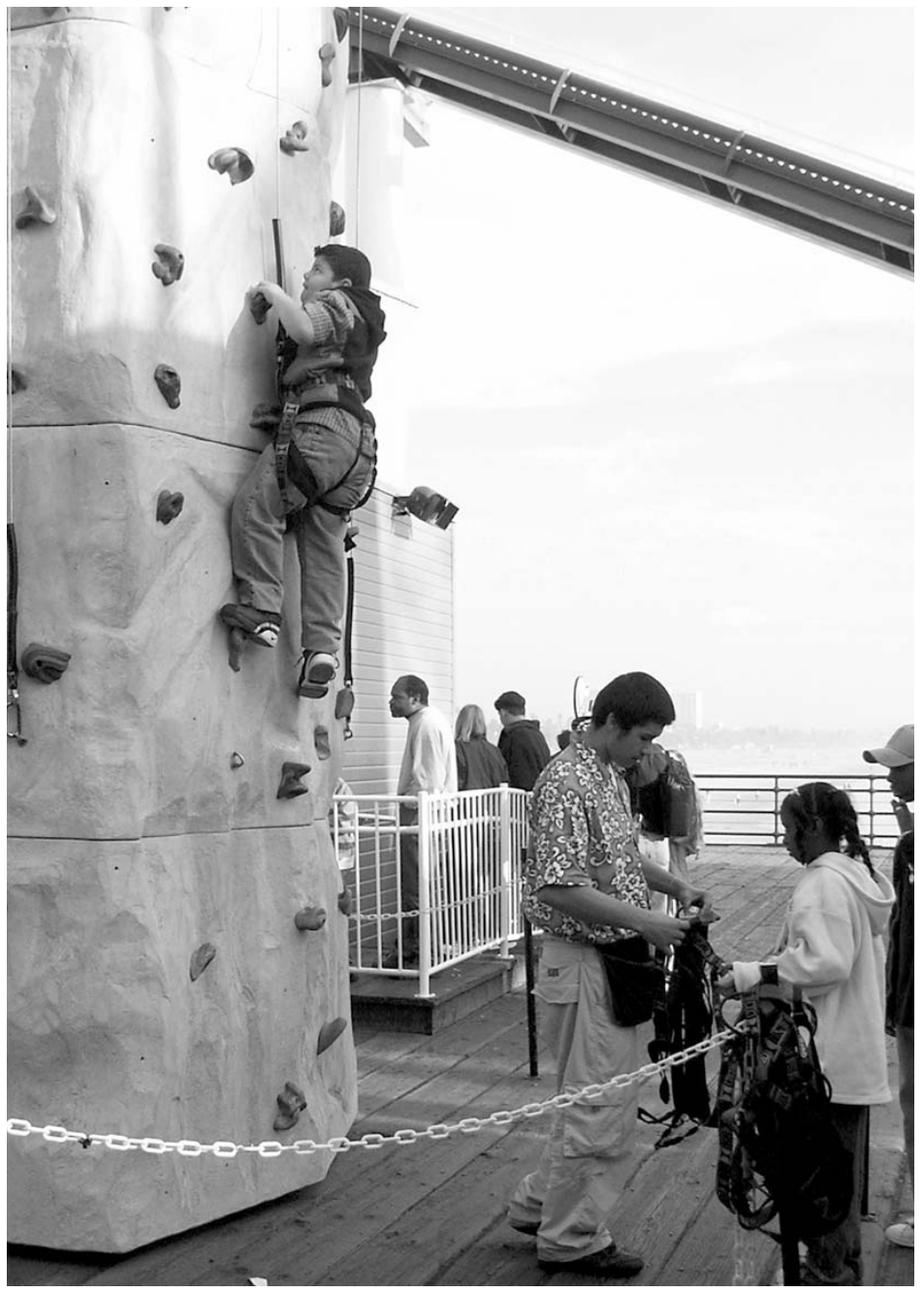
Los Angeles County officially announced that "Voters Election Reform Initiative for a True Accountability System," also known as VERITAS, has collected the necessary 9,000 signatures in its attempt to change the city's election charter. The change would allow citizens to vote for their own mayor and one council member from their respective neighborhoods. The group submitted 13,000 signatures, but just more than 9,000 were actually legal.

But some city council representatives think deceptive tactics were used to gather the signatures and not all the information was presented to those who signed the initiative to get it on the ballot next year.

"Gathering signatures is not that hard," said Santa Monica City Councilwoman Pam O'Connor.

The current law allows the mayor to be elected by the seven city council members. City council candidates run at-large throughout the eight square miles of Santa

See ELECTION, page 3



Del Pastrana/Daily Press
Children anxiously await their turn on the climbing wall at Santa Monica's Pacific Park Thursday afternoon, while Brian Moreno challenges his skills.

Cops out in full force

They're looking for drunks behind the wheel

By Daily Press staff

More local cops will be out patrolling the streets in the next several days in an attempt to crack down on drunk driving.

As part of its annual holiday campaign against drunk driving, the beefed up enforcement started over the Thanksgiving weekend with a sobriety checkpoint at Sixth Street and Santa Monica Boulevard. Police stopped 606 motorists — two were arrested — one for driving under the influence and the other for giving false information to a police officer. Three more checkpoints were to occur during December.

But for the upcoming week, saturation patrol is the Santa Monica Police Department's primary focus. The holiday season typically is one of the highest periods of alcohol-related traffic deaths and the department is trying to avoid as many tragedies as possible this year.

Last year, an estimated 16,653 people were killed across the country in alcohol-related crashes, which represents nearly 40

See DRIVING, page 3

Man wins $500 odd-gift contest

By the Associated Press

ONTARIO, Calif. — Michael Ackerman won a $500 odd-gift contest through the process of elimination.

The Diamond Bar man on Wednesday won the Ontario Mills mall's "What Were They Thinking?" contest for the wackiest Christmas gift. Ackerman's winning entry: a portable urinal for computer addicts unwilling to leave their seats.

See CONTEST, page 3

Unmanned plane takes flight

By the Associated Press

PETALUMA, Calif. — Authorities found the wreckage of a small plane Thursday morning that broke from its moorings at a rural Sonoma County airstrip and took off, minus a pilot.

A California Highway Patrol plane spotted the mangled plane near the dam at Lake Berryessa in Napa County. There was no sign of fire.

No one was sure how the Aeronca Champion, a small two-seat plane from the 1950s, took off unmanned Wednesday afternoon. CHP officials said it flew 20 to 25 miles before it crashed in a remote area.

The owner, Paul Clary III, of San Rafael, "was working on the engine, I guess, and it got away from him," said Sonoma County sheriff's spokesman Phil Coughlin.

Deputies said helicopters searched for the wreckage until darkness fell Wednesday and picked up a transponder signal about 4 miles east of Petaluma.

The plane had less than 15 gallons of fuel, according to the Federal Aviation Administration.

Coughlin said the plane lifted off from a small farm airstrip in the county's southwest around 4:30 p.m.

"Luckily in Sonoma County there are a lot of wide-open areas," said sheriff's Lt. Rich Sweeting. "Most of the acreage in Sonoma County is not populated."

The plane is notorious for flying around with nobody at the controls.

See PLANE, page 3

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JACQUELINE BIGAR'S STARS

The stars show the kind of day you'll have:
★★★★★-Dynamic ★★★★-Positive ★★★-Average ★★-So-so ★-Difficult

ARIES (March 21-April 19)
★★★★ Your mood swings from depressed to angry. True to your sign, you most likely feel more comfortable yelling and screaming than internalizing your feelings. Don't worry, you won't get any ulcers this way — although you might give ulcers! Tonight: Burn off steam doing errands, dancing or some other physical activity.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
★★★ You could be quite disconcerted by someone and his or her decisions. You also might be affected by past emotions in a financial situation. How you tell someone you have had enough could jolt this person. Sometimes everyone needs to establish limits. Tonight: First take care of your budget.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20)
★★ You might be more serious than you realize. You also might not be up for tolerating someone's disruption or uproar. You clearly let someone know you have had enough! What starts as a disagreement could wind up in a power play, whether you want it to or not. Tonight: Chill out.

CANCER (June 21-July 22)
★ Take your time with someone in your life. You might have to change plans. An in-law or relative could be the source of the problem. Don't let a situation become a runaway train if you can help it. You easily could be overwhelmed. Tonight: Hide out.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)
★ You might have a difficult time maintaining your sunny ways right now. Review a problem with detachment, or you could find yourself in the middle of the "War of the Roses." Avoid control games of all sorts. Be honest with yourself. Tonight: Let off steam with friends.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)
★★ Tension could build with superiors as well as with family members. You might be right that you cannot juggle demands simultaneously. Still, give it a shot, because in the long run, it might be important to know that you tried. Someone could be angry. Tonight: In the limelight.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)
★★★★ Your diplomatic skills are in demand and are desperately needed. Flow with a change of plans, eyeing all that you can do, as opposed to all that you cannot do. Go off and get some exercise, or take a walk. Reduce stress. Tonight: Make merry with your friends.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)
★★★ After recent money struggles, you could wind up making a resolution to change what goes on financially in 2002. With creativity you might be able to change your direction. Be careful with a loved one, be it a child, lover or potential suitor. Tempers flare. Tonight: Listen to someone; say little.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)
★★ Play it low-key as others fire up. Perhaps recent stress has been too much for everyone. Be honest with yourself. Aren't you a bit saturated? Focus on your work rather than on the negatives. Take some time to decide what New Year's resolution would be significant. Tonight: Go along with someone.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)
★★ Much of what spouts out of others' mouths proves to be significant, giving you a lot of insight. Don't get involved in power struggles or in someone else's bad mood. Also, decide not to take what others say personally. Focus on your work. Clear out extra paperwork. Tonight: Squeeze in some much-needed R&R.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)
★★★ You inadvertently find yourself struggling between two different people or factors in your life. You can't win, because you're between a rock and a hard place. You might opt to go off on a spending spree to alleviate some of the tension. Tonight: Treat yourself well, as long as you're going overboard!

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)
★★ You might not be sure why you are angry. However, you do need to vent and clear out your frustration. Be careful with a boss or someone in charge. Be clear as to what is getting to you. Don't smack the cat when you would like to scream at your lover. Tonight: Vanish.

WEATHER

Today ... Mostly cloudy with a high 64°F. Winds from the south southwest at 6mph.

Tonight ... Mostly cloudy with a low of 49°F. Winds from the southwest at 2mph.

Tomorrow ... Mostly cloudy High—63°F Low—49°F

QUOTE of the DAY

"It is a scandal that there are two and a half homeless people in America."

— Mike Dukakis, meaning to say "two and a half million"

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Special election may go to VERITAS

ELECTION, from page 1

Monica's city limits.

The system, which has been in place for more than 60 years here, works just fine for a city of 84,000 people, according to O'Connor. She's afraid politics in Santa Monica would become too disconnected if council members were elected by districts.

"I think it would result in the balkanization of Santa Monica," she said. "It would start pitting district against district."

She also thinks it would create career politicians for the mayor's seat.

"I think it would institutionalize the position of the mayor in a political fashion," she said.

But Paul DeSantis, who helped spearhead the VERITAS effort, thinks Santa Monica's election process makes it unattainable for the average person to run for office and it is not a representative government. Currently, it allows for slate-financed campaigns dominated by huge special interest money, he said. What's more, if people could vote for their mayor, it "politically legitimizes" the position, DeSantis said.

"This would reduce the power slates," he said. "The only criterion is loyalty to the slate. The supporters of VERITAS, on the other hand, believe in 'meritocracy.'"

The VERITAS initiative would give citizens a direct line to City Hall by electing one representative from each district, making their politicians accountable to those who elected them, supporters argue.

"People should be elected not because they have a loyalty bought and paid for by organizations that are essentially political machines but because of their merit demonstrated in face to face relationships with their neighbors," DeSantis said. "Sadly, instead of an open political process we have degenerated into government by lawsuit, confrontation and polarization. Santa Monica's economy has suffered as long established business loyal to our community have been pushed out and new ones are reluctant to locate here."

VERITAS hopes to have a special election for the initiative in the early part of next year, however costly it may be.

"If this was about dog leashes, that would not be an appropriate measure," DeSantis said. "But you have 9,000 people signing a petition for an election and that's serious."

O'Connor would rather see the initiative come during the regular November election.

"I'm somewhat of a fiscal conservative," she said. "I want to get the most bang for your buck and the cost of a special election is high."



Del Pastrana/Daily Press

A young couple cuddles in Palisades Park as they overlook the ocean horizon as the sun sets.

Police search for drunk drivers during the holidays

DRIVING, from page 1

percent of all traffic fatalities. More than 1,000 of those deaths were in California and three of them were in Santa Monica.

"It's our goal to make this holiday season one of the safest seasons ever for those visiting and shopping in Santa Monica," said SMPD Chief James Butts.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving believe sobriety checkpoints are one of the most effective ways to detect and deter drunk drivers.

"Our roadways must be free from the threat of alcohol-impaired drivers," said Tina Pasco, executive director of MADD, Los Angeles. "Highly publicized sobriety checkpoints alert motorists to stay off the roads or designate a non-drinking driver to avoid a drunk driving arrest."

Public opinion polls show support for sobriety checkpoints and studies show a reduction in alcohol-impaired driving where checkpoints have been used.

Senior citizens identification program launched by SMPD

By Daily Press staff

The Santa Monica Police Department has created an identification program that will help track lost senior citizens.

The police department plans to set up a database of senior citizens that will have all relative information about them like their address, as well as a photo. The registry will be confidential and will only be used by Santa Monica police officers to search for characteristics that match those of the lost person. Police say the registry will reduce the amount of time it takes to identify a person and notify his or her caregiver.

"From time to time, our officers are called upon to assist lost senior citizens," said SMPD Chief James Butts. "Often these individuals are disoriented and unable to remember their names or where they live. They sometimes experience a long wait while the officers try to identify and return them to safety and comfort of their home."

Last year, the city of Santa Monica received grant funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, a division of the U.S. Department of Justice. The city council has earmarked a portion of that funding for the automated personal identification registry.

If anyone would like to be registered in the identification program, contact Sharon De Cruz at 458-8451 or e-mail her at sharon-de-cruz@santa-monica.org.

Champions known for taking off on their own

PLANE, from page 1

In 1997, a Champion took off without a pilot in rural Ohio and flew for 90 minutes before crashing into a bean field.

In 1990, a Champion taxied in circles on the ground at a small Florida airport with the pilot hanging on to the door. He jumped free and the plane crashed into a soda machine.

In 1987, the same model got away from its pilot and flew by itself for 65 miles over rural New York before slamming into a tree.

Experts said the plane is prone to such behavior because of an old-fashioned starting system which requires the pilot to open the throttle and then climb out to crank the propeller to get the engine running.

Earthquake victims have a week to stake their claims

By the Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Insurance policy holders who were victims of the 1994 Northridge earthquake have until Dec. 31 to reopen claims.

Under state law, policy holders who did not receive adequate compensation for property damage were given another chance to have their claims reviewed despite the one-year statute of limitation on their quake policies.

"Many property owners found earthquake-related damage after the original claims period had expired. SB 1899 was signed into law to assist those that were denied benefits under their policy," attorney Brian Kabateck, who helped draft the bill that took effect in January 2001, said Thursday.

The bill grew out of a probe of settlements negotiated by former insurance commissioner Chuck Quackenbush with insurance companies. Quackenbush resigned in July 2000 and is still under investigation.

Under the bill, policy holders who contacted their insurance company before Jan. 1, 2000, about possible damage can re-open a claim. Those who received an attorney-aided settlement or court settlement cannot refile.

"Policy holders must act now before it's too late," Kabateck said.

Urinal for those who don't want to 'get up' gets the prize

CONTEST, from page 1

Ackerman was relieved to give up the odd present, which was donated to the Salvation Army along with other entries. Ackerman got the present in an office gift exchange.

"I think I can kind of stagger to the bathroom," he said. "I don't know who can use it or how, but someone will."

The Wednesday morning contest included other unusual gifts: A sweat shirt made from recycled lint, multicolored slippers and an ornate candy bowl. Fontana resident Heather Jensen won $250 for her second-place entry, a talking picture frame from her cousin.

She wasn't upset about placing second behind Ackerman.

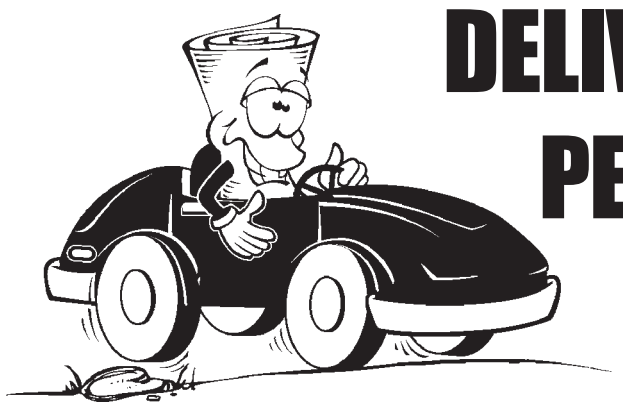
"That was the worst," she said of the urinal. "He deserves that (money)."

Mall spokeswoman Sue Palacios was philosophical about the portable urinal.

"One man's junk is another man's treasure," she said.

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STATE

Yahoo wins bidding war for HotJobs.com takeover

BY BRIAN BERGSTEIN
AP Business Writer

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Yahoo! Inc. agreed to take over Internet career site HotJobs.com for $436 million Thursday after the owner of rival Monster.com decided not to sweeten its 6-month-old offer for HotJobs.

Yahoo had made an unsolicited bid for HotJobs two weeks ago in hopes of wresting the No. 2 help-wanted site away from No. 1 Monster, which is owned by TMP Worldwide Inc. of New York.

Analysts had expected a bidding war between TMP and Yahoo, but TMP said Thursday it would not raise its bid.

"We are very pleased to be joining Yahoo."

—DIMITRI BOYLAN
Chief executive, Hotjobs.com

"We are very pleased to be joining Yahoo," said HotJobs' chief executive, Dimitri Boylan.

With revenue expected to be down 37 percent this year, Yahoo is hunting for new ways of making money beyond advertising. HotJobs charges employers and recruiters to post job openings and to access its database of resumes.

HotJobs' database of 5 million resumes trails Monster.com's 14 million, and HotJobs lost $21.2 million in the first nine months of the year.

But Yahoo believes HotJobs is in good position to take advantage of the expected surge in online job postings and recruitment as the economy recovers. Analysts expect HotJobs' revenue to rise 12 percent next year.

HotJobs stock was down 29 cents to $10.38 in afternoon trading on the Nasdaq Stock Market. Yahoo was up 31 cents at $17.82, and TMP was up $2.10 at $43.98.

Statistics report says dot-com death toll doubled in 2001

BY MICHAEL LIEDTKE
AP Business Writer

SAN FRANCISCO — The dot-com death toll doubled this year, with at least 537 Internet companies either going out of business or seeking refuge in bankruptcy court, according to statistics released Thursday.

This year's casualties joined 225 dot-coms that perished during 2000, said Webmergers.com, a San Francisco-based deal maker that has tracked the rise and fall of the Internet economy.

"To say that the decline in shutdowns is because there are no dot-coms left is a bit like saying a decline in rabies rates is due to the fact that all the dogs are dead," Webmergers said in its analysis.

The dot-com wipeout triggered a tidal wave of layoffs, including cuts made by Internet companies trying to weather the storm by pruning expenses.

Through November, dot-com companies had announced 98,522 layoffs, more than doubling the 41,515 firings made in 2000, according to Challenger, Gray & Christmas Inc., a job-locating firm in Chicago. The firm plans to announce year-end totals Monday.

"To say that the decline in shutdowns is because there are no dot-coms left is a bit like saying a decline in rabies rates is due to the fact that all the dogs are dead."

Webmergers.com

But the worst may be over.

Only 21 Internet companies have failed in each of the past two months, the lowest mortality rate since 10 dot-coms failed in August 2000.

The recent dropoff has prompted some observers to conclude that most dot-coms have already been wiped out, but Webmergers said that perception is wrong.

The site estimates that 7,000 to 10,000 Internet companies remain in operation. That means the financial devastation of the past two years claimed no more than 10 percent of the sector, leaving behind a stronger — and possibly wiser — group of survivors.

Dot-com layoffs also are tapering off. In November, Internet companies announced 2,901 job cuts, down dramatically from the peak of 17,554 layoffs announced in April.

California, home to the technology-rich Silicon Valley, sustained the most dot-com damage. Since January 2000, 227 Internet companies based in California have closed or filed for bankruptcy, accounting for 30 percent of the nationwide total during that period, Webmergers said. New York, home to Silicon Alley, ranked next with 75 dot-com failures during the past two years.

India and Pakistan go at it tit-for-tat

BY NEELESH MISRA
Associated Press Writer

NEW DELHI, India — With their armies facing each other along the border, India and Pakistan jabbed diplomatically Thursday, ordering half of each other's embassy staffs sent home and banning overflights by each other's national airlines.

The tit-for-tat sanctions in a confrontation set off by a suicide attack on India's Parliament were the worst since the last India-Pakistan war in 1971. Both governments said they want peace, but stressed they are prepared to fight.

"There is no measuring scale that we have to say how near or how far we are to war," Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh told reporters as he announced the latest sanctions on Pakistan. "I will just say this: Don't worry. We are ready."

In Pakistan, a spokesman for President Gen. Pervez Musharraf's military government offered similar sentiments "We have the capacity to react and retaliate in all conceivable ways," said Gen. Rashid Quereshi.

China, which neighbors both nations, said Thursday that it was "deeply worried" by the escalating tensions between the two nuclear-armed antagonists and called for "dialogue and consultations" to keep stability.

In Washington, the Bush administration urged the leaders of the two countries to come to an understanding at a South Asia summit next week in Nepal. "They need to resolve their differences through dialogue," said Philip Reeker, a State Department spokesman.

India's government has accused Pakistan of responsibility for the Dec. 13 attack on the Parliament compound in New Delhi, in which nine Indians and five attackers died. Pakistan denies having anything to do with the raid.

India has imposed a series of diplomatic and economic sanctions to reinforce its demands that Pakistan move against two militant Islamic groups that help secessionist Muslims fighting in India's Jammu-Kashmir state.

With tensions rising, both countries have been moving military forces into border regions. There was no indication that either side had deployed nuclear weapons, which both are believed to keep stored unassembled.

Heavy skirmishing with guns and artillery have been reported along the frontier, but Pakistani authorities said the dividing line was quiet Thursday.

India's foreign minister said the airline and embassy sanctions announced Thursday were necessary because India's concerns over terrorism "have not been fully grasped in Pakistan."

A Pakistani spokesman decried the move, but said the regime in Islamabad had to respond in kind.

"Our desire is that the matter should be resolved through talks, but these Indian steps will further complicate the situation. Therefore, we are taking reciprocal steps," said Aziz Ahmed Khan, spokesman for Pakistan's Foreign Ministry.

The airline ban takes effect Jan. 1. That is the same day that India previously set for shutting off train and bus service between the two countries.

India is also hoping for international pressure on Pakistan, such as the United States labeling as terrorist organizations the two militant groups — Lashkar-e-Tayyaba and Jaish-e-Mohammed — that India blames for the Parliament attack.

Pakistan said this week it had frozen the two groups' bank accounts and briefly detained the leader of Jaish and some of his followers.

Singh, the Indian foreign minister, said in a nationally televised news conference Thursday that Pakistan's actions were intended to "dupe the international community." He noted the arrested Jaish leader was quickly freed and the asset freeze was announced days in advance, which would give the groups time to empty their accounts.

India wants Pakistan to put the groups out of business, shut their training camps closed, ban their recruitment and use troops to block militants from crossing into Jammu-Kashmir.

Pakistan denies providing any material support for militant Islamic groups, but calls their members "freedom fighters" for participating in the 12-year-old insurgency in Jammu-Kashmir. Human rights groups say more than 60,000 people have died during the rebellion in Kashmir, which has been the focus of two of the three wars India and Pakistan have fought since 1947.

Pakistan has been urging India to engage in talks, indicating Musharraf would be willing to sit down with Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee at the South Asia summit.

India has rejected any meeting between the two leaders at the summit.



Associated Press

In this image made from video, first broadcast by the Qatar-based television station Al-Jazeera on Wednesday, Osama Bin Laden speaks from an undisclosed location at an undisclosed time. His statements indicates he was speaking in recent weeks. Writing at bottom center reads "Osama bin Laden condemns/accuses the West of hating the religion of Islam and the Muslims." At top right is "Exclusive to Al-Jazeera." At bottom left is the name of the news program "Events of Today."

Bin Laden urges strikes on U.S. economy to bring down the nation

BY TAREK ISSAWI
Associated Press Writer

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The world's most wanted man, Osama bin Laden, appeared in a videotape Thursday, calling for the destruction of the U.S. economy as the surest way to bring down America.

Looking gaunt but smiling occasionally, the terrorist leader appeared in front of a brown cloth, dressed in military fatigues. Though thinner than in past tapes, his voice was strong and clear. He spoke deliberately, often leaning into the camera.

"I concentrate on the importance of continuing holy war actions against America, militarily and economically, and America is retreating with God's help," he said in a videotape sent anonymously by air courier from Pakistan to Qatar-based Al-Jazeera television, which aired it in full Thursday night.

"This economic hemorrhaging continues until today, but requires more blows. And the youth should try to find the joints of the American economy and hit the enemy in these joints, with God's permission."

In an apparent appeal to Muslim youths, bin Laden repeatedly referred to the 19 hijackers who carried out the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon as martyrs. He said they "struck deep in the heart of America's economy."

The tape has raised new questions about where bin Laden is or if he is alive. A spokesman for Afghanistan's new defense ministry said bin Laden was in a border area of Pakistan. Other Afghan officials said his whereabouts were unknown.

In Washington, U.S. Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said experts would examine the tape for any valuable intelligence information on bin Laden. He admitted the United States did not know where the al-Qaida leader was. "We hear six, seven, eight, 10, 12 conflicting reports every day" on bin Laden's location, he said.

DOT wants airlines to report reasons for flight delays

By the Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Regulations proposed Thursday would require the nation's largest airlines to tell the Transportation Department why their flights were late.

The airlines already track the flights that arrive at least 15 minutes behind schedule and report that information to DOT. The proposed regulations also would require the airlines to disclose why the flights were delayed.

Airlines are flying fewer flights since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, but more of them are arriving on time.

DOT reported that 84.8 percent of airline flights arrived within 15 minutes of their scheduled time in October, the highest percentage since September 1997, when planes had an 85 percent on-time record.

"On-time performance has improved in 2001 but the operators of the nation's aviation system must have information on the actual causes of delays and cancellations to reduce the problem in coming years when air traffic is likely to resume its rapid growth," said the director of DOT's Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Ashish Sen.

The DOT is seeking comments on the proposal for 60 days.

Under the proposal, delays would fall into one of three categories: airline problems, such as cleaning, damage, or waiting for connecting passengers or crew; weather; and operational delays, such as airline security, too many flights trying to land at the same time, or air traffic control problems.

The nation's 11 biggest airlines would be required to supply the information. Smaller airlines, which do not have to report flight delays to the DOT, would be exempt from the proposed rules.

COMICS

The Dinette Set by Julie Larson



Natural Selection®

By Russ Wallace



"My address? I live in that big shoe on Taylor Street."

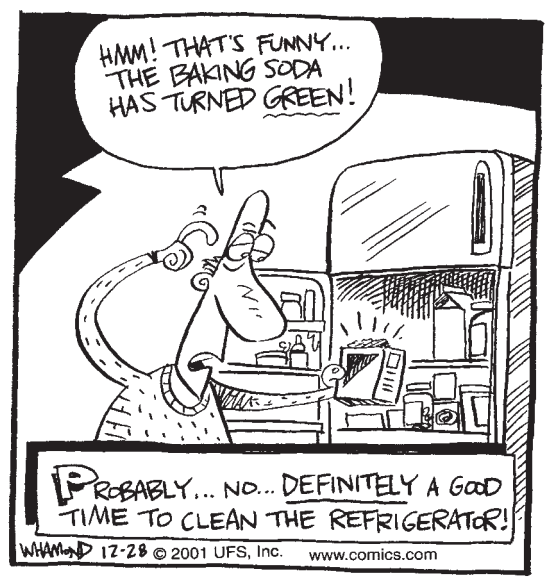
edge city

by TERRY & PATTY LABAN



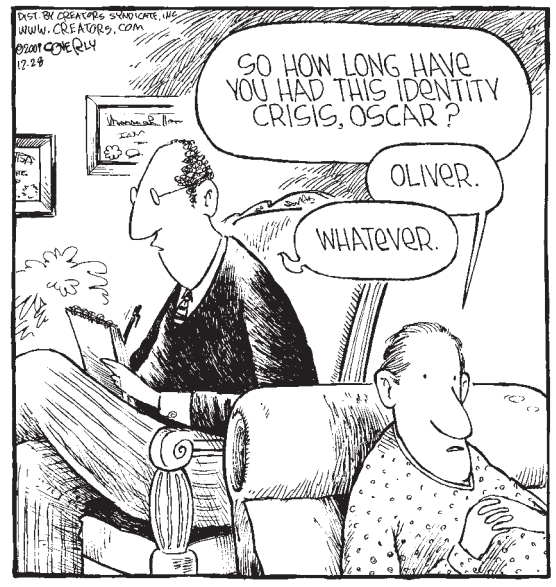
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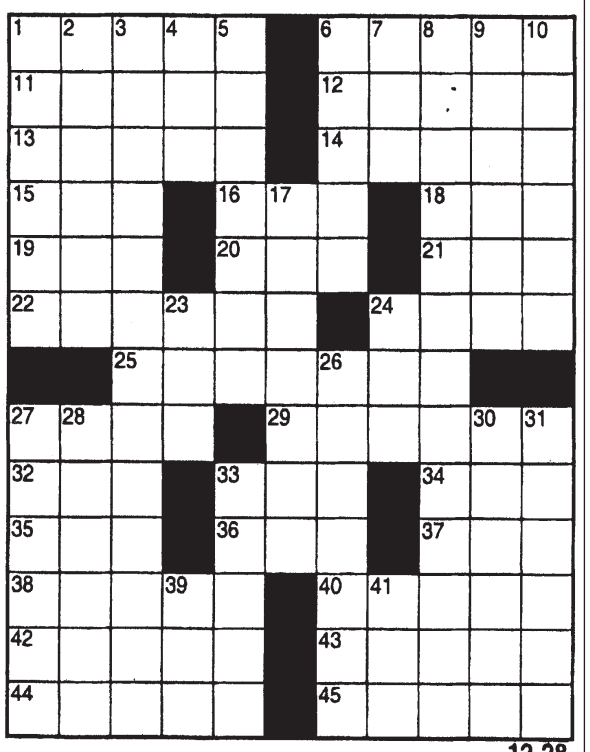
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6 Shock
11 Saudi's neighbor
12 Depart
13 Raised
14 Movie rentals
15 "Bamboozled" director
16 Summer sign
18 Print units
19 Blunder
20 Powerful people
21 Regret
22 Flat resident
24 Counterfeiter chasers
25 "And I Still Rise" poet
27 Daze
29 Kingdoms
32 Barracks bed
33 Gender
34 Diamond need
35 Boxing great
36 Amin of Uganda
37 Important age
38 Take it easy
40 Singer Simon
42 Draw out
43 "— Grows in Brooklyn"
44 Rx amounts
45 Stratum

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1 Singer Robert
2 Current unit
3 Marine mollusk
4 Compass pt.
5 Moving like a crab
6 Choir group
7 Pod unit
8 Shade producer from Asia
9 Wide street
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17 Typed in
23 — Arbor
24 Start of an ode title
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28 Sword-making city
30 Matlin of "The West Wing"
31 One who doesn't budge
33 Some dice rolls
39 Casino card
41 — loss

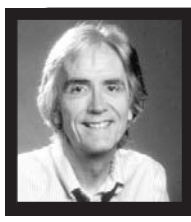
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Yesterday's answer



12-28

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NEWS OF THE WEIRD

by Chuck Shepard

Brothels on the fast track

• To resolve a problem unknown in American governments, state authorities in Queensland, Australia, decided in October that local bureaucrats were taking too much time to process applications to open legal brothels and thus decided to adopt a fast-track program to jump-start the industry. The state government announced it would appoint an independent official to get more brothels up and operating, thus stymieing town officials who are opposed to having them in their neighborhoods.

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BACK PAGE

ODDS & ENDS

Santa Claus gets into fist fight

By the Associated Press

LEHIGH ACRES, Fla. — A man who took a swing at a mystery man in a Santa suit discovered that Father Christmas was up to the challenge, according to authorities.

Jonathan Danzey, 20, is facing misdemeanor intoxication and criminal mischief charges after authorities say he got into a fight with Santa on Saturday at a fast-food restaurant 100 miles south of St. Petersburg.

"Santa Claus whipped his butt," said Katherine Phillips, who witnessed the fight.

"He won," Danzey conceded. "He was stronger and more sober."

According to Lee County sheriff's deputies, Danzey saw Santa in a convertible and became belligerent when Santa told him he had no gifts for him.

"I was in a bad mood," Danzey told the Fort Myers News-Press on Wednesday. "I started out joking around with him. He said something, then I said something else and then I ended up hitting him."

Santa fought back, ripping Danzey's shirt and knocking him to the ground, witnesses said.

Santa Claus left before deputies arrived, so his identity remains a mystery.

Lost ring turns up 53 years later

By the Associated Press

LUTZ, Fla. — The black velvet box that Helen Swisshelm opened on Christmas Eve held the class ring she lost 53 years earlier in the Hudson River.

"When I saw it, it looked like the day I first I received it," Swisshelm said.

She lost the gold and onyx ring in 1948, when she was 17 and swimming with friends in the river. They searched the silt and rocks for the ring for hours.

Swisshelm, now 70 and living north of Tampa, received a call earlier this month from her alma mater, the Academy of the Holy Names in Albany, N.Y. A man had found a class ring from the school inscribed with the her initials, H.M.D., and contacted the alumni association.

Ken Rohling, of New York, said he found the ring with his metal detector. He returned it to Swisshelm in time for the holidays.

Swisshelm, who taught music at the Academy of the Holy Names in Tampa, said she plans to send Rohling an award.

Cows stray away from home

By the Associated Press

EASTON, Pa. — Three cows that wandered off a farm have been hoofing around suburban Easton for about three months, defying efforts to bring them home.

Williams Township Manager Jeff Marsh said the township has gotten a few phone calls about roaming cattle, but nobody has filed a formal complaint so far. Officials are looking into the matter, he said.

"A couple of people called to say, 'I have cows in my back yard at night,"' Marsh said. At least one resident reported not being able to back out of her driveway because cows were blocking it and refusing to move.

Residents in the town of 2,800 said the animals have not caused any damage.

Township officials are trying to figure out if the owner is violating any laws. Marsh said the township is advising people to call state police if the cattle damage their property.

Shirley Cavallo, whose family owns the cows, said the family is working to lure them back. She speculated that hunters knocked down a fence, allowing the cattle to escape.

"The township is changing so much, they don't know where they belong," she said of the cows.

Trail of candy leads to guilt

By the Associated Press

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — A trail of Skittles candy wrappers led police to three children whom they charged with breaking into a vending machine and robbing a coin-operated laundry.

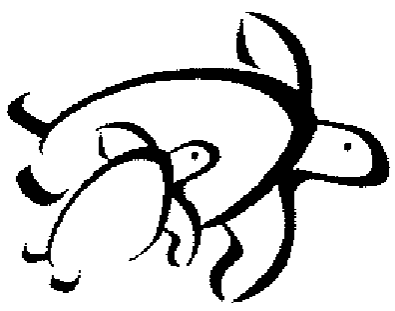
Police were called to Angel's Coin Laundry Tuesday to investigate a smashed window, $10 in missing quarters and stolen candy from a vending machine, said Gainesville Police Cpl. Keith Kameg.

Officer Tom Wright noticed the empty candy bags and followed them to a nearby boy on his bike. The boy admitted that he broke into the store with his brother and a friend.

The three boys, ages 9, 12 and 14, were taken to the Gainesville Juvenile Assessment Center.

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