FREE

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Santa Monica Daily Press

A newspaper with issues

‘High risk’ sex offender moves into neighborhood

Parolee back in Santa Monica

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON
Daily Press Staff Writer

A convicted sex offender classified as “high risk” has been released from prison and is living in Santa Monica.

Arthur Akouris, 43, was ordered as a condition of his parole to register as a sex offender with the Santa Monica Police Department. He lives in the 1100 block of Chelsea Avenue, just north of Wilshire Boulevard and near Douglas Park.



Arthur Akouris

Akouris was previously listed as a serious sex offender, a lesser status than high risk. He has been convicted of several offenses, some of which occurred in Santa Monica, police said. SMPD detectives did extensive research and background on Akouris with the Department of Justice to get his status elevated.

“Our detectives working sex crimes did additional follow up on this subject to move his status to high risk,” said SMPD Lt. Frank Fabrega. “It’s the (chief of police’s) policy that all high risk sex offenders get publicized.”

Akouris was identified as a high risk sex offender by the Department of Justice based on his criminal history. He is required to register as a sex offender as a result of his convictions.

Akouris is currently on felony parole with a condition that prohibits him from being out of his home between the hours of 7 p.m. to 8 a.m. He served time in prison for oral copulation and sexual battery, among other offenses.

The SMPD’s policy to publicize high risk sex offenders living in Santa Monica is made possible by Megan’s Law and allows the public additional information

See OFFENDER, page 5

eBay bidding for Northern CA town closes at $1.7 million

BY ANNA OBERTHUR
Associated Press Writer

SAN FRANCISCO — Frenzied eBay bidding for a tiny Northern California town closed at $1,777,877 Friday.

If the deal goes through, all 82 acres will go to the unidentified buyer who topped the leading bid just seconds before the auction closed at 9:56 a.m. PST. Bridgeville is the first town to be sold on the Web site, said eBay spokesman Kevin Pursglove.

Almost 250 bids were cast during the town’s month on the electronic auction block. “I would say that’s above average. That’s a pretty heavy level of bidding activity,” Pursglove said.

The town, which owner Elizabeth Lapple acknowledged was a fixer-upper, comes complete with a post office, a mile and a half of river bank, a cemetery and more than a dozen cabins and houses. “Your own zip code will now be 95526,” the eBay description reads.

The town’s price went well beyond the reserve amount of $775,000. Bidding started Nov. 27 at $5,000.

Bridgeville is located 260 miles north of San Francisco in rural Humboldt County. Lapple and her husband Joe have owned the town since 1985.

After conventional means of selling proved unsuccessful, the Lapples decided to try their luck on eBay. They say they put the town up for auction because they couldn’t afford the estimated cost of renovating it — about $200,000.

Joe Lapple said the highest bid was more than he expected.

“It’s a little more than we hoped,” he said. “A million and a half, I figured that was the right price.”

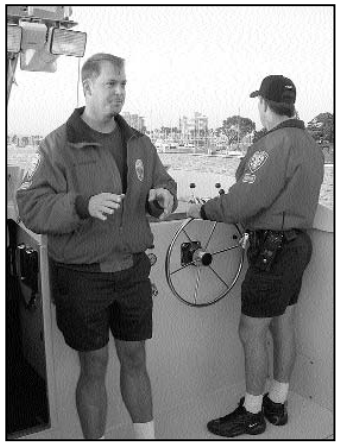
Final bids for real estate posted on eBay aren’t binding, Pursglove said.

“It’s up to the seller and the high bidder to negotiate how they are going to consummate the deal,” after bidding ends, Pursglove said. “They’ll close the deal off line.”

Joe Lapple said he hopes the new owner will fix up the town, which dates back to the 19th century. But the Lapples won’t be hanging around to find out. They’ve already purchased a new home in Fortuna, about 25 miles away.

“We were just waiting to sell this town and pack up all our stuff and be gone,” said Joe Lapple.







Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press

(Top) Officer Tom Brierley demonstrates the fire hose on the harbor patrol boat, which is used to assist agencies in fires and rescues. (Left) Officers Matt Anderson and Dave Finley explain the harbor patrol’s role in the city to a group of citizens recently. (Right) Officer Wayne Salkoski and Sgt. Steve Heineman take a trip out to sea.

Santa Monica Harbor Patrol comes to the rescue

An arm of the SMPD, the specialized unit patrols the bay, beach and pier

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON
Daily Press Staff Writer

The Santa Monica Pier is flanked on both ends with specialized police units, but a different kind of authority exists at what’s known as the end of the line.

The harbor patrol, a division of the Santa Monica Police Department, is stationed at the end of the pier to watch over the bay, the beach and just about everything around it.

The group of more than a dozen men, who are not sworn officers, often find themselves in just as dangerous situations as officers on the street. While harbor patrol officers don’t go through the SMPD’s rigorous police academy, they are trained year-round in specialized areas because their jobs put them in a variety of roles.

Harbor patrol officers typically are first responders to tragedies at sea, including plane crashes, boat rescues and drowning incidents.

The more prevalent harbor patrol res-

See PATROL, page 6

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HOROSCOPE

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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)
★★★★ Much that goes on stems from your dreams. The plans you make will somehow tie into your sleep revelations. Think in terms of success and new beginnings, knowing that anything is possible. Loosen up with someone you often are guarded with. Tonight: Don't make a big deal out of anything.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
★★★★★ Deal with different ideas carefully, as others could be touchy. You might say nothing and still get quite a reaction. Why not allow others to present their ideas? You find solutions when you least expect them. Tonight: Go along with the program.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20)
★★★★ Others come up with ideas that you might wonder about. Use timing to hedge and allow everyone to gain a perspective. You might want to try something new or different with a loved one. Being innovative gets the type of results you want. Tonight: Put your feet up.

CANCER (June 21-July 22)
★★★★★ Unexpected behavior marks a relationship. You might not be exactly sure what needs to happen. Allow greater creativity and innovation in your life. You find answers where you least expect them. Laugh through a problem. Tonight: Play away.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)
★★★★ Loosen up with your projects. Make less of a big deal or let go of a problem. You cannot keep pushing others. Take your time dealing with loved ones. You could find that another is most unpredictable. Think through a decision carefully. Tonight: Play it low-key.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)
★★★★★ Make an extra overture. Take that extra step. Start writing thank-you notes and reaching out for others. Your ability to express yourself could surprise even you. That extra effort could make all the difference right now. Tonight: At your preferred spot.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)
★★★★ You make more than an extra effort toward a child or loved one. Your unpredictability takes you in a new direction, if you allow it. Be aware that perhaps you need to make an extra effort toward someone else close. Tonight: Indulge a loved one.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)
★★★★★ Your personality melts others' resistances. You might not be as sure of yourself as you would like to be. Take your time with an unpredictable family member who might not see eye to eye with you. Understanding flows. Tonight: Whatever makes you happy.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)
★★★ Realize more of what you want from others. You might want to cut back a little in order to observe others' limits. You will notice that not everyone agrees with you. Lay back, and when you feel timing is with you, charge on in. Tonight: Get a good night's sleep.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)
★★★★★ You won't be content alone. Make an effort to reach out to others and touch base with friends you haven't talked to for a while. Catching up on news and following the very social nature of the next few days fits the bill. Make the most out of the moment. Tonight: Where the action is.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)
★★★★★ You might want to think through a decision that involves a boss or someone you put on a pedestal. What remains key is knowing when you cannot do anything more. Stay on top of a present situation, if possible. Tonight: A must show.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)
★★★★★ Your mind might not be present, even if your body is. Take the next few days to escape and gather another perspective. Try to see a situation differently. Be more open to possibilities. Consider your options. Tonight: Read between the lines.

QUOTE of the DAY

"I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just."
— Thomas Jefferson *(1743-1826)*

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The Q Line

Mixed concerns for public education

This past week, Q-Line asked:

"Does the lack of funding for public education in California concern you? Why or why not?"

Here are your responses:

■ "The many California school districts need to sharpen their purchasing skills. All manufacturers have their fleet and volume prices. The way to get the very best volume price is to order a great deal of merchandise at one time. Due to each school district being a dynasty unto itself, it is difficult for these various school districts to combine their purchase order needs to create a large volume purchase. The school districts asking for bids not solve this problem. Bids vary on the basis of quantity. Tough negotiation on a volume purchase deal would guarantee the best price. If the state of California purchases 10,000 buses at one time and distributed those school buses to each school district according to their needs, the fleet price would be a great deal less. This volume price saving remains consistent on every product the school districts purchase. If the school districts would combine their purchasing needs, millions of dollars would be saved annually. The days of free spending are over. Sharp business practices must now prevail."

■ "As a resident of Santa Monica with a masters degree in education, I would like to suggest that the Board of Education consider substituting the usual school textbooks with the following sources. First is: 'High School Subjects Self Taught.' Edited by Lewis Copeland, the 1989 version. Second: 'How to Help Your Children With Reading Writing and Arithmetic.' By Freida Van Atta, 1968. No other textbooks. They could keep them for a lifetime."

■ "I believe that Santa Monica's financial priority should be education. Instead we spend half a million dollars on really tacky decorations on the Promenade. We need to change our priorities."

■ "I am and am not concerned about the so-called lack of school funding. The budgets have been traditionally overinflated to begin with. Unnecessarily huge amounts of money have been mismanaged and misused. Full disclosure of all amounts of moneys received by the educators, etc., and how it is used should be public."

■ "No. It does not. My children have already gone through the public school system, which at that time was beginning to falter. At this particular time, I feel the school districts are in such disarray because there are so many illegal immigrants coming from south of the border."

■ "Why be concerned? There is no hope as long as California tries to educate all of Mexico and those that are here illegally."

■ "Of course, the schools need money. They can't get it from the property tax and parcel taxes. I don't see why the residents of Santa Monica should be subsidizing the schools of Malibu, which is one of the richest places on earth."

■ "Education has become a joke in this country, especially in this state. I think it has a lot to do with leadership or a lack thereof. Kids are not expected to perform. I think that has a lot to do with who's in charge."

■ "The lack of funding for education does not really concern me. I am more concerned about the lack of education. Learning hardly goes on in out schools. Children are taught to sit still, past tests and follow orders. There is such a disorganized power structure running things. The more I talk to teachers, the more I talk to kids, the less hope I have for this system helping children no matter how much money is poured into it. I don't know what the answer is, but I don't believe that the problem is lack of funding."

surf report

Information compiled by Jesse Haley

Conditions are small again today, as we ride out the end of a dwindling northwest swell.

There were some fun sets Wednesday. Longboarders caught some decent, little, peeling rights inside the take-off at Leo Carrillo, and Manhattan Beach beach breaks were hitting with knee- to waist-high surf.

Health officials still advise avoiding the water due to remnant pollution and run off from the rains early in the week.

Today promises further decline in swell and more small, blown-out conditions.

We are expecting some new swell Sunday, when we should see waves ramp up a foot or two, but weather reports call for more rain.

Today's Tides:

High-	3:56 a.m.	4.67'
Low-	10:30 a.m.	1.72'
High-	3:48 p.m.	3.50'
Low-	9:57 p.m.	1.00'

Location	Saturday	Sunday	Water Quality
County Line	2-3'/Fair	3-4'/Fair	N/A
Zuma	2-3'/Fair	3-4'/Fair	N/A
Surfrider	1-2'/Fair	1-3'/Fair	N/A
Topanga	2-3'/Fair	2-3'/Fair	N/A
Breakwater	3-4'/Fair	3-4'/Fair	N/A
El Porto	3-4'/Fair	3-4'/Fair	N/A

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OPINION

Notes on 2002: From sex to surgery to game shows



MODERN TIMES

By Lloyd Garver

With all the rushing around we do in the holiday season, we sometimes miss important news stories. With that in mind, I bring you the following report which should get you up to date as we say "good-bye" to 2002.

LOVE AND MONEY — 72-year-old German playboy and disco magnate, Rolf Eden, has offered more than $250,000 to any woman who will have sex with him until he dies from it. In order to get the money, Herr Eden must die from a heart attack in the woman's arms. It gives new meaning to the term, "killer sex."

MIDEAST SOLUTION — Under Saudi Arabia's strict interpretation of Islam, women are generally barred from being salespeople. So, they have to buy their underwear from men. Understandably, many women are embarrassed and humiliated by the idea of being fitted by a man, so they just guess at their size, grab a bra and get out of the store as fast as they can. According to an expert interviewed by the New York Times, about 85 percent of Saudi women are walking around wearing the wrong size bra. Presumably, this uncomfortable situation exists in other countries in the region. No wonder there's always such unrest there. If almost half our population were running around with ill-fitting underwear, how happy would our country be? Instead of dropping leaflets (or bombs), we should be dropping millions of bras on the region. The women will be happier, so the men will be happier, and maybe everybody will be a little more peaceful. These women obviously need support.

MEDICINE — A Boston orthopedic surgeon left a patient for 35 minutes with an open incision during a spinal fusion procedure. The doctor explained that he needed to cash a check at a nearby bank. There is no truth to the rumor that hospitals are thinking about installing ATMs in their operating rooms.

WHEN IN ROMANIA — 1,000 workers at a Romanian car factory are trying to help bail out their debt-ridden employer. They are doing so by donating sperm to a fertility clinic in return for payment. Each "donation" brings in about $50. Since the auto plant's debts are about $20 million, I doubt the men will have enough energy left over to work on cars.

THE PRESIDENT — The White House announced that President Bush sent out 1.2 million Christmas cards this year. I assume some Democrats will claim that he really sent out only 1.1 million cards, while some Florida Republicans will say the number was 12 million.

OUT THERE DEPARTMENT — Television game shows are getting more and more outrageous and ridiculous. As if millionaires, bachelors, fear and idols weren't enough, now a new Russian game show will award the winner with a chance to journey into space. It's only appropriate that contestants on these kinds of shows go where there is no intelligent life.

THE BIG STORY — Researchers in Great Britain have finally determined that there is absolutely no correlation between the size of a man's feet and the size of his penis. However, there is a correlation between the size of a man's feet and the size of his shoes.

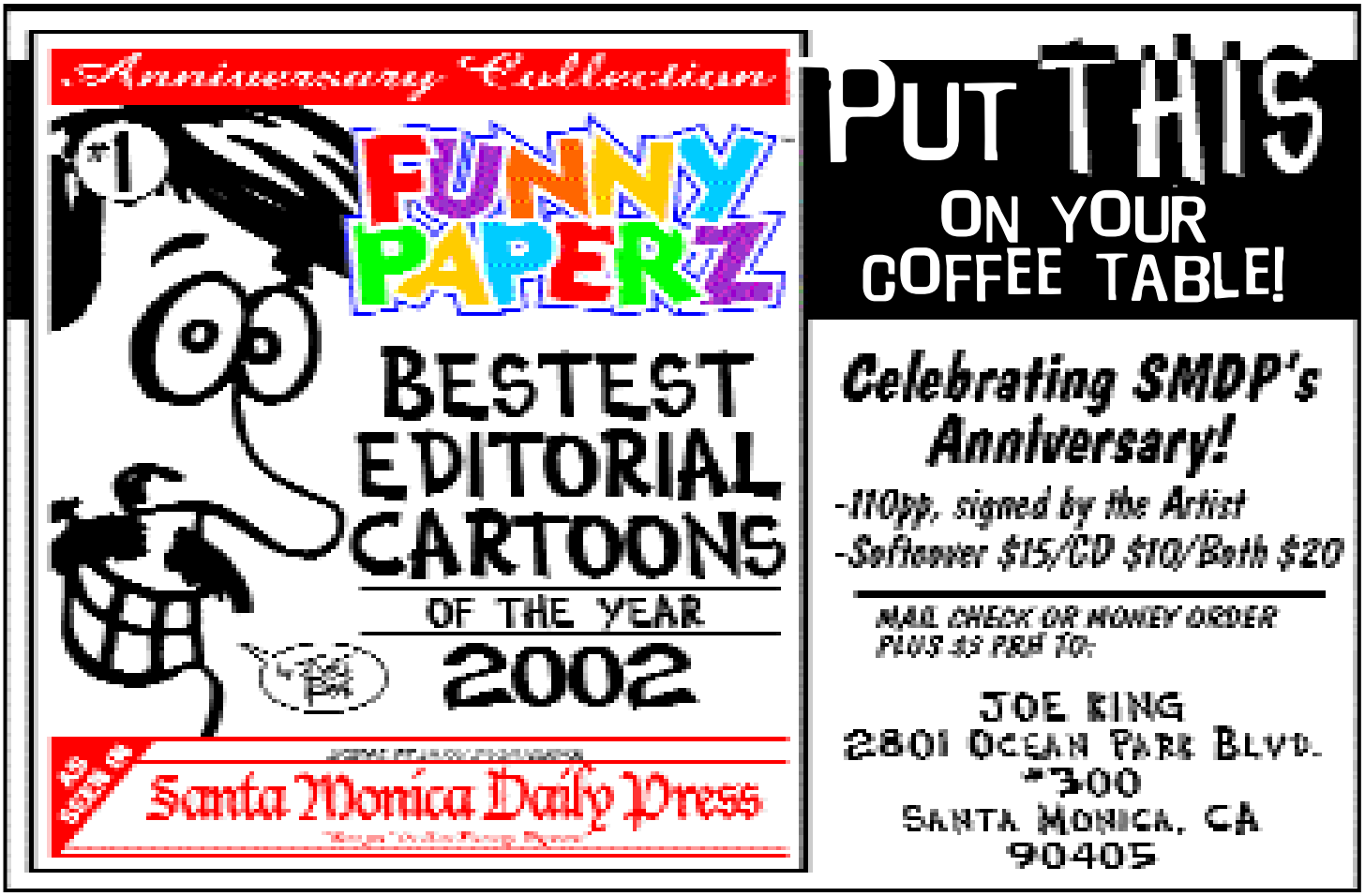
WORST PUBLIC RELATIONS OF THE YEAR — Paul McCartney announced that he would like to change the credits on some classic Beatle songs so that they would be "McCartney-Lennon" instead of "Lennon-McCartney." Soon after this, I hope that McCartney realized he had placed his mouth in his foot.

TELEVISION NEWS — MTV/VH1 canceled a reality show starring Liza Minnelli and her husband David Gest. The show was supposed to follow the couple around as they went about their daily business. It was canceled before even one episode had aired. Maybe there is hope for our civilization after all.

Happy Holidays!

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

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

Megan's Law informs neighborhood of sex offenders living in area

OFFENDER, from page 1

to protect themselves and their children. The law is not intended to punish the offender and specifically prohibits using the information to harass or commit any crime against the offender, police said.

"It's the (chief of police's) policy that all high risk sex offenders get publicized."

— LT. FRANK FABREGA
SMPD spokesman

In August, there were 50 registered sex offenders living in Santa Monica, according to results from a search of the Los Angeles County Sex Offender database. At that time, there was only one "high risk" sex offender living in Santa Monica. He is identified as Clark Ashley, a black male, who was convicted of rape by force or intimidation, oral copulation and oral copulation with a person under 14.

A person that is considered a "high risk" sex offender has been convicted of a violent sex offense as well as other offenses. A "serious" sex offender has been convicted of a felony sex offense or child molestation. Another level, classified as "other," is sex offenders who have been convicted of either indecent exposure, spousal rape, misdemeanor sexual battery, pornography or incest.

In California, there are 1,774 high risk sex offenders; 77,254 serious sex offenders and 17,335 offenders that fall into the "other" category.

For more than 50 years, California has required dangerous sex offenders to register with their local law enforcement agencies. However, information on the whereabouts of these sex offenders was not available to the public until the Child Molester Identification Line in July 1995 was installed, according to the state attorney's general office. The information available was further expanded by California's Megan's Law in 1996.

Megan's Law is named after 7-year-old Megan Kanka, a New Jersey girl who was raped and killed by a known child molester who had moved across the street from the family without their knowledge. In the wake of the tragedy, the Kankas sought to have local communities warned about sex offenders in the area.

The law also authorizes local law enforcement to notify the public about high risk and serious sex offenders who reside in, are employed in or frequent the community.

Cities with populations over 200,000 are supposed to make information about their registered sex offenders available to the public under Megan's Law. For those cities with smaller populations, like Santa Monica, the same information is made available at any Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department station. The database is updated quarterly throughout the year.

The state's registry is often legally challenged. The U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco upheld the state's sex offender registry program in August when it was challenged by a man who was arrested for possession of marijuana and was found to be an unregistered sex offender.

Locally, the SMPD remains vigilant in its lookout for sex offenders that have not registered with the city in accordance with the conditions of their parole or release from prison.

How to search for sex offenders

By Daily Press staff

Information on Santa Monica's sex offender population can be found at numerous Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department stations.

A list of sex offenders living in Santa Monica is available at the West Hollywood sheriff's station on the corner of San Vicente and Santa Monica boulevards.

All that is required to search the database is a valid driver's license. However, making copies and printouts is strictly forbidden, but paper and pens are allowed.

The database allows users to search by first names, last names, specific addresses, sex, height, weight, county and zip code. By entering Los Angeles County, a list of some 12,000 sex offenders will pop-up on the screen.

To find sex offenders by zip code, which is the easiest way to find those living nearest you, enter only the specific postal area that you are interested in and the lists will appear.

The database gives you the specific names of the registered sex offenders in that area. By clicking the person's name, another screen will appear with a description and often times a photo of the person. Information is also provided about what crimes the offender has been convicted of.

Though specific addresses of the offenders are not listed, local police are permitted to inform residents, schools and childcare facilities of sex offenders with multiple convictions living nearby that are considered a "high risk."

FIND OUT YOUR FORECAST IN TODAY'S HOROSCOPE'S ... PAGE 2

DIVORCE LAW
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LOCAL

Harbor patrol ready to tackle situations on land and sea

PATROL, from page 1

cues are the dozens of suicide attempts by people who jump off the pier. The harbor patrol headquarters are manned 24 hours a day so when someone takes a leap into the water, there is always an officer on hand ready to make the plunge 25 feet down to the icy and unforgiving waters of the Pacific Ocean.

The latest rescue was just six days ago when harbor patrol officers had to jump into 58 degree water at 8:50 p.m. on Sunday after they received a report of a man in the water, clinging to a pier piling. He was rescued in three-foot high surf in stormy conditions, according to Harbor Patrol Officer Dave Finley.

There are at least a dozen people a year who either attempt or commit suicide by jumping off the pier.

SMPD Sgt. Steven Heineman, who oversees the unit, said he remembers five attempted suicides in just a month.

But a lot more suicides would happen if the harbor patrol wasn't stationed at the end of the pier.

"There have been numerous people we've prevented from jumping," said veteran Harbor Patrol Officer Wayne Salkoski, who has been at the pier for 26 years. "If we weren't here, there would be a lot of successful suicides."

Harbor patrol officers often become negotiators with people who are mentally distraught. Sometimes people will alert the patrol that a person is contemplating the jump, and other times officers see the jumper themselves.

"You are going to try to talk to them first," Salkoski said. "If they look despondent, we try to prevent them from jumping. You stay away if they aren't cooperative."

The result of a failed negotiation can have dangerous consequences. Officers in the water sometimes have to be forceful in their rescue attempts when the person fights back. And if it's in the middle of the night in bad weather, it can be a life or death situation for the officers.

"They don't want to be rescued, and it can be really dangerous," Salkoski said.

Salkoski remembers one suicide attempt when he watched a man talk on his cell phone with his wife, hand the phone to a nearby fisherman and jump. Salkoski and officer Matt Anderson launched the harbor patrol boat while officer Finley jumped in. The man was unconscious and taken to shore, where he was treated.

While people falling off the pier is less common, the harbor patrol still has to make dramatic rescues from time to time. Harbor patrol officers Jaime Morado and Donald Davis saved a man's life last month after he fell off the pier at 3 a.m. while he was drunk. The 24-year-old Latino man was being thrashed around in high surf in stormy weather when Morado and Davis jumped in and pulled him to safety.

"We've made some spectacular rescues out here, and we've worked our butts off to make them," said Harbor Patrol Officer Tom Brierley. "We have a lot of talents, a lot of skills and a lot of responsibilities."

People routinely jump off the pier for kicks, despite that it's a misdemeanor to do so. Heineman remembers an incident this past summer when a man from New Zealand barreled down the pier on a rented bike and flipped off the end of the pier.

He was greeted by harbor patrol officers as he walked up the ladder.

"He had a crash helmet on with an American flag and was fully clothed," Heineman said. "My first thought was he's a 918 (mentally distraught) and not all there."

It turns out the foreigner and his vacationing friends are big fans of the T.V. show "Jackass" and were inspired to film the incident so when they went back home they had highlights from the trip.

"They go back to the pub and show it to their buddies and laugh about it," Heineman said.

As the function of the pier has changed, so has the role of the harbor patrol. In the 1930s, when the breakwater still existed, the pier was the main harbor for boats in the Santa Monica Bay. The harbor patrol then was mostly concerned with providing support to the marina, including the boats and facilities.

Today, the pier is still the city's main tourist attraction. Harbor patrol officers are constantly offering assistance and information to tourists. A requirement for harbor patrol officers is to have at least a year of experience of contact with the public. They are also trained in boat rescues, marine firefighting and are certified EMTs and underwater divers. They are continually re-training themselves with other agencies that they assist, including the Coast Guard, the Los Angeles County Lifeguard, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, the Santa Monica Fire Department and the SMPD.

Because their jobs are so varied and specialized, harbor patrol officers often times find themselves in situations that require immediate response before other agencies can get there. And while its role is to assist other agencies, if there is a fire on the pier, a car accident on the Pacific Coast Highway, an animal or a boat rescue to be made at sea or a plane crash to respond to, the harbor patrol is the first unit on scene. A harbor patrol boat and sea-doos are docked at the pier most of the year, which allow officers to move quickly up and down the coast.

"Any problem out here that arises, we handle it or get it handled," Brierley said.

The harbor patrol also keeps the peace on the pier among the performers, tourists and locals. The harbor patrol is highly visible with the public and even though they aren't sworn SMPD officers, they look as if they are.

"It's a fine line for the officers because they are dressed like sworn officers but don't have the same training and a lot of times they happen upon something," Heineman said. "It can be a difficult situation."

It can be especially difficult when the incident is criminal and harbor patrol officers must make quick decisions before calling for back up from the SMPD.

Brierley, who has been with the harbor patrol for eight years, said there are areas of the beach that can be extremely dangerous, especially at night. One of them is under the pier, which has an extensive underground tunneling system where transients and criminals hang out. Only the experienced patrol that area, Brierley said.

"At night, we do things in partners," he said. "There are parts of the pier that I won't take new officers to."

Heineman, a SMPD officer who has worked in the vice unit, as well as day patrol, came to the harbor patrol more than a year ago. He said he has never seen such a group of men work so well together.

"I'm very impressed with how well these guys trust and work with each other," he said from his office that offers million-dollar views of the Pacific Ocean. "They do a lot of reviewing of their training and can handle the criticism ... I've got the best office and work with the best guys."





Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press

Above: (From left to right clockwise) Harbor patrol officers Ryan Penrod, Tom Brierley, Wayne Salkoski and Sgt. Steve Heineman survey the pier and Santa Monica Bay from the harbor patrol boat one recent afternoon. Penrod had jumped 25 feet into the Pacific Ocean and swam to the boat as part of ongoing training.
Right: Officer Dave Finley patrols the coast of Santa Monica.

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STATE

'Beef Bowl' feeding



Todd Wawrychuk/Associated Press/Lawry's/Long Photography

Rose Queen Alexandra Wucetich feeds Washington State defensive tackle Rien Long, left, and quarterback Jason Gesser at the 47th annual Beef Bowl at Lawry's The Prime Rib Restaurant on Thursday in Beverly Hills, Calif. Washington State meets Oklahoma on New Year's Day in the Rose Bowl.

Man arrested after neighbors throw boiling water at him

By The Associated Press

CERRITOS — A group of residents subdued a man who crashed his car into a utility pole and stabbed a woman in the stomach by throwing a pot of boiling water on him.

Thanh Nguyen, 30, of Stockton was arrested Thursday and booked for investigation of attempted murder.

Authorities said Nguyen was arguing with his girlfriend about noon when he lost control of the car and struck a telephone pole.

He ran into a home pushed a woman aside and grabbed a knife from her kitchen, deputies said. He ran around the block and entered another house through a garage door.

At that location, he stabbed a woman and bit her husband, authorities said. The husband and neighbors subdued Nguyen after tossing scalding water at him.

"Why he decided to go on a rampage in our city is a complete mystery to us," sheriff's Sgt. Don Alexander said.

The woman had stab wounds to her stomach, leg and hands. Her husband suffered a bite on the hand. Both were being treated at St. Francis Hospital in Lynwood.

Judgment upheld against Larry Flynt, two card rooms

By The Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — A state appeals court has found that California's compacts with Indian tribes allowing them to offer certain types of gambling on Indian land passes constitutional muster and doesn't deny card rooms, which can be operated off Indian land, equal protection under the law.

Hustler magazine publisher Larry Flynt and two Los Angeles card rooms, Hustler Casino and Normandie Casino, sued the California Gaming Control Commission and the state attorney general in November 2001.

Flynt and the card rooms said letting certain Indian tribes offer games, including banked and percentage games and slot machines, but not letting card rooms offer them has created a monopoly and put the card rooms at a competitive disadvantage.

Banked games, in which the house has a stake in the game's outcome; percentage games, in which the house collects a share of the amount wagered; and slot machines, as well as other high-stakes casino-type games, are known as Class III games.

The plaintiffs also said that existing laws deny the card rooms equal protection because the card rooms are prosecuted if they offer Class III games, while Indian tribes are not. Flynt and the card rooms asked the court to let them offer the Class III games.

The 1st District Court of Appeal agreed with a San Francisco County Superior Court judge that the state's compacts with Indian tribes don't create an unconstitutional monopoly in violation of equal protection. The appeals court concluded that the compacts pass constitutional muster because they are related to "the fulfillment of Congress' unique obligation toward Indians."

CA destroys thousands of chickens to contain Newcastle

BY CHELSEA J. CARTER
Associated Press Writer

LOS ANGELES — State officials have destroyed more than 100,000 infected chickens and quarantined poultry in three counties because of a potentially ruinous outbreak of a deadly disease.

Exotic Newcastle Disease, which is deadly to poultry but cannot be contracted by humans, was first detected in backyard flocks in October. This week, officials confirmed it had been discovered at a poultry farm near Riverside.

"Finding it in a commercial flock is a first in California since 1974," Larry Hawkins, a spokesman for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, said Friday.

"It's not only serious because there is a direct threat to the poultry industry in California, but because it also brings about quarantines from our trading partners," he said.

A statewide outbreak of the disease in the 1970s threatened the entire U.S. poultry and egg supply and led authorities to destroy nearly 12 million chickens. It cost $56 million to eradicate the disease.

The California Department of Food and Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Agriculture have prohibited the movement of all poultry, poultry products and nesting materials from Los Angeles County and portions of Riverside and San Bernardino counties, Hawkins said.

Because the disease cannot be transmitted to humans, eggs are being sanitized and allowed to pass through the quarantine zone.

California is the nation's third-largest egg producer. More than 9 million of the state's 12 million egg-laying hens are in the quarantine zone.

Leticia Rico, spokeswoman for the California Department of Food and Agriculture, would not identify the commercial poultry farm where the outbreak occurred.

The farmer was participating in a mandatory reporting procedure put in place in October and contacted authorities after noticing a slightly higher than normal mortality rate among chickens.

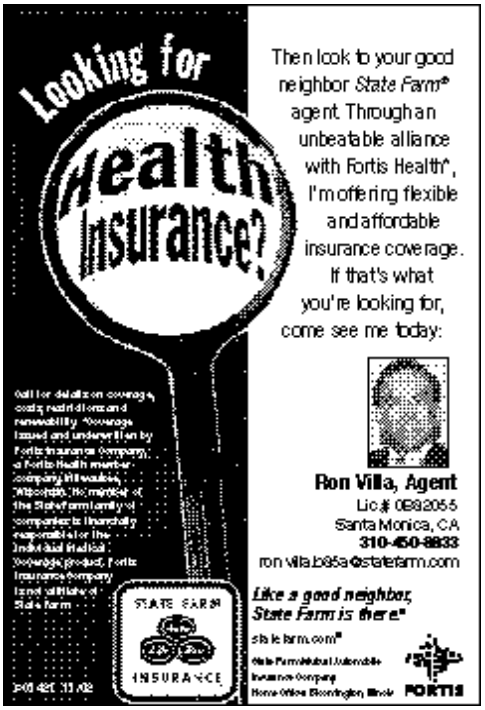
"At this point, we have euthanized the flock, and they have been safely disposed of," Rico said. "The facility is being cleaned and disinfected."

The Press-Enterprise of Riverside said the diseased chickens were discovered at Orchard Egg Farms. The owner of the farm did not return calls Friday from The Associated Press.

A task force made up of state and federal agriculture officials and scientists has been monitoring the outbreak since it was first reported among backyard flocks and pets in Southern California. The task force has been monitoring and advising commercial farms on security measures.

"We're recommending to them that their biosecurity programs should be as stringent as possible," Rico said. "The disease doesn't discriminate between commercial and backyard birds."

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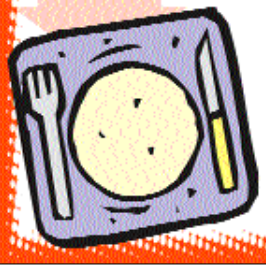
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NATIONAL

Florida company claims birth of human clone

BY MALCOLM RITTER
AP Science Writer

HOLLYWOOD, Fla. — Ushering in either a brave new world or a spectacular hoax, a company linked to a religious sect that believes in space aliens announced Friday that it has produced the world's first cloned baby.

A healthy 7-pound girl, nicknamed Eve by scientists, was delivered by Caesarean section Thursday somewhere outside the United States, said Brigitte Boisselier, chief executive of Clonaid. Boisselier said the girl is an exact genetic copy of the American woman who gave birth to her.

At a news conference, Boisselier offered no scientific proof, provided no photographs and did not produce the mother or child. She said proof — in the form of DNA testing by independent experts — will be available in perhaps eight or nine days.

"You can still go back to your office and treat me as a fraud," she told reporters. "You have one week to do that."

Cloning experts were skeptical or reserved judgment on the announcement, which is certain to touch off fierce ethical, religious and scientific debate. In Washington, the Food and Drug Admin-istration said the agency will investigate whether the experiments violated U.S. law.

The United States has no specific law against human cloning. But the FDA contends that its regulations forbid human cloning without prior agency permission. And the agency has no intention of giving the OK.

"The very attempt to clone a human being is evil," said Stanley M. Hauerwas, a professor of theological ethics at Duke University. "That the allegedly cloned child is to be called Eve confirms the god-like stature these people so desperately seek."

Boisselier would not say where Clonaid has been carrying out its experiments and did not identify any of the scientists involved.

She described the mother as a 31-year-old with an infertile husband. The couple has decided not to face the media now, she said.

She said four other couples are expected to give birth to Clonaid-created clones by early February.



Hillery Smith Garrison/Associated Press

Michael Guillen, a former science editor at ABC-TV, addresses the media as Brigitte Boisselier, CEO of Clonaid, looks on during a press conference in which Boisselier claimed that her company Clonaid produced the world's first human clone, a baby girl, in Hollywood, Fla. Friday.

Clonaid was founded in the Bahamas in 1997 by Claude Vorilhon, a former French journalist and leader of a sect called the Raelians. Vorilhon, who calls himself Rael, claims a space alien visiting him in 1973 revealed that extraterrestrials had created all life on Earth through genetic engineering.

Boisselier, who claims two chemistry degrees and previously was marketing director for a chemical company in France, identifies herself as a Raelian "bishop" and said Clonaid retains philosophical but not economic links to the Raelians. Rael is "my spiritual leader," Boisselier said.

"I do believe we've been created by scientists," she said. "And I'm grateful to them for my life."

She said neither the infertile couple nor the four other couples are Raelians. The other couples are a pair of lesbians from Northern Europe; two couples from North America and Asia who seek to clone dead children from cells taken before their deaths; and a second Asian couple, she said.

Twenty more women are scheduled to be implanted with cloned embryos, she said. So far, 10 women have been implanted; five had miscarriages in the first three weeks, and the other five led to "Eve" and the four current pregnancies.

No couple has paid for the cloning effort, but some of the first five couples invested in Clonaid and became business partners, she said. She said she does not know how much Clonaid will charge once it begins to offer the service commercially.

To gain convincing proof that "Eve" is a clone, Boisselier said she accepted an offer by former ABC News science editor Michael Guillen. Guillen, now a free-lance journalist who said he has no connection to Clonaid, said he has chosen "world-class, independent experts" whom he did not identify to draw DNA samples from the mother and the newborn and test them for a match.

To do the cloning that led to "Eve," scientists removed the nucleus from an egg of the woman and merged the altered egg with a skin cell from her, Boisselier said. The DNA from the mother's skin cell took over direction of the egg.

Legislation or guidelines to ban human cloning are pending in dozens of nations, including the United States. Several countries, including Britain, Israel, Japan and Germany, already have banned it.

NATIONAL

New guidelines adopted for wetlands replacement

BY JOHN HEILPRIN
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration adopted a new plan and guidelines Thursday for replacing swamps and bogs that have been filled or drained to make way for highway, housing or other projects.

Administration officials said their approach, based on input from six agencies, will not diminish the role of wetlands in providing habitat to wildlife, flood control and water quality.

They said the focus will be on the quality of new wetlands being created, rather than the traditional emphasis on maintaining total wetlands acreage.

"These actions affirm this administration's commitment to the goal of no net loss of America's wetlands and its support for protecting our nation's watersheds," Christie Whitman, administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, said.

Les Brownlee, acting assistant Army secretary for civil works, said there would be better government decision-making in the permit process and improved planning to make up for wetlands losses.

The 17-step plan and guidance letter is meant to clarify policies for regulating wetlands according to clean water laws and to put in place better tools for monitoring and measuring success.

The administration will require "no net loss" of wetlands among the Army Corps of Engineers' 38 U.S. districts rather than acre-for-acre restoration on each project, Benjamin Grumbles, a deputy assistant administrator of EPA's Office of Water, said. The districts overseen by the Corps, the nation's Pentagon-based construction agency, follow watersheds rather than state boundaries.

"It's laying out a road map for ways to improve the ecological success of wetlands compensation," Grumbles said.

EPA spokesman Joe Martyak said the first priority is preventing wetlands losses, and the administration will continue to emphasize that wetlands being created should be similar to what they are intended to replace.

But he said the underlying needs of a watershed would be weighed more heavily than whether there is a net loss of acreage.

"These actions affirm this administration's commitment to the goal of no net loss of America's wetlands and its support for protecting our nation's watersheds."

— CHRISTIE WHITMAN
Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency

"It's not just acre-for-acre," Martyak said of the new approach. In some cases, he said, regulators may find that "it's a numerical loss, but it's an ecological gain."

The administration's approach is a response to reports by the National Academy of Sciences and the General Accounting Office, Congress' investigative arm, which found that many wetlands replacement projects are failures and are not well-tracked.

Julie Sibbing, a wetlands expert for the National Wildlife Federation, said her group was pleased administration officials were tackling a difficult area of regulation, but their ideas seemed vague.

"There's no details," Sibbing said. "It doesn't commit to improving mitigation at all in the short term, and it appears to leave the door open to practices that have contributed to net loss of wetlands in the past."

"We always thought that an absolute minimum ought to be an acre for an acre," she added, "given the miserable success rate of mitigation projects, where up to 80 percent of them will never become fully functioning wetlands."

Wetlands are marshy, swampy or boggy areas that filter and cleanse drinking water, retain flood waters, harbor fish and shellfish and support other wildlife, such as by providing stopping points for migratory birds.

Their destruction contributes to flooding, pollution runoff into streams and rivers and loss of important habitat for fish and wildlife.

Golfers beat up teen for stealing ball

By The Associated Press

LONGWOOD, Fla. — Two golfers were arrested for allegedly beating up a 14-year-old boy who took one of their balls, authorities said.

Gary Mottola, of Oviedo, said he was cutting across the Wekiva Golf Club's sixth hole when he saw a golf ball in a sand trap and took it.

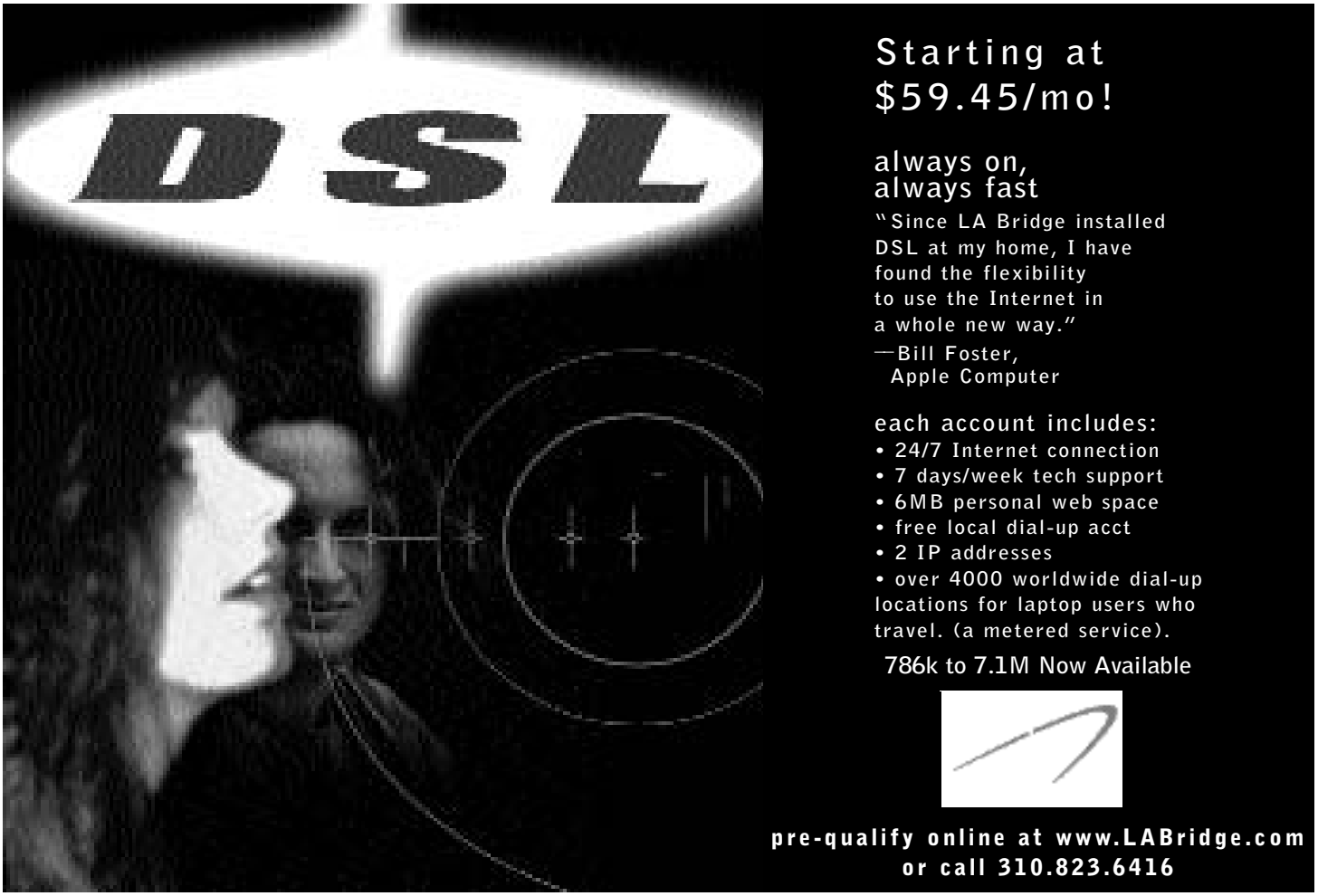
Mottola and other witnesses told deputies that the ball's owner, Andrew Young, 41, of Longwood, and Richard Bailey, 44, of Lansing, Mich., kicked and punched the boy after one of the men tackled him and dragged him back to the course.

"All I did was take a ball," said Mottola, who suffered bruises and was treated at a hospital in Longwood, about 15 miles north of Orlando.

Young and Bailey were charged with misdemeanor battery, and each was released from Seminole County jail Friday after posting $500 bond.

Messages left for Young and Bailey at their homes were not immediately returned Friday. Sheriff's officials said the men denied hitting Mottola.

Deputies said they will ask prosecutors to charge Mottola with trespassing and stealing the ball.



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NATIONAL

White House denounces North Korea move to reactivate nuclear plant

BY RON FOURNIER
AP White House Correspondent

CRAWFORD, Texas — Stung by North Korea's defiance, the White House denounced the expulsion of U.N. nuclear inspectors Friday but said military action was not being contemplated to counter Pyongyang's gathering nuclear ambitions.

"We seek a peaceful resolution," White House spokesman Scott McClellan said as President Bush vacationed at his nearby ranch. "I think for now we need to let the discussions happen with our friends and allies about the next steps that we take."

U.S. officials said an envoy, perhaps Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly, probably would be sent to the region next month to confer with allies.

As U.S. officials privately voiced misgivings that the current approach may not be working, Bush's foreign policy team met at the White House to discuss limited options. Democrats stepped up their criticism, with a key senator accusing Bush of ignoring North Korea too long.

"What happened in North Korea today is predictable and totally anticipated based on this administration's complete avoidance of a responsible approach to North Korea in over a year and a half," said Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., who plans to challenge Bush for re-election.

When he came into office, Bush put the brakes on U.S.-North Korean relations because he said Kim Jong Il's government could not be trusted. The relationship spiraled downward when Pyongyang acknowledged in October that it had a secret nuclear weapons program.

"It is the absence of diplomacy. It is the absence of common sense ... that has brought this on," Kerry said in a telephone interview.

In a provocative challenge of Bush's hard-nose policy, North Korea expelled nuclear inspectors Friday and announced it will reactivate a laboratory that the United States claims can produce enough weapons-grade plutonium for several atomic bombs.

The Koreans have said they were restarting the reactor to generate electricity.

"These recent actions are not designed to produce electricity, but rather to advance North Korea's nuclear weapons capability," McClellan told reporters.

The action escalated tensions over Pyongyang's plan to unfreeze nuclear facilities shut down in a deal with the United States in 1994. It also underscores dramatically different approaches that Bush has taken with North Korea, Iraq and Iran — the nations he called an "axis of evil."

While he is prepared to go to war early next year to disarm Saddam Hussein's Iraq, the president is determined to curb North Korea's ambitions through diplomatic pressure, aides said.

The strategy reflects that North Korea has not been as hostile as Iraq in recent years as well as the grim reality that Pyongyang could respond to a U.S. attack with massive force against South Korea and Japan, aides said. In the path of an assault on South Korea would be 37,000 American troops patrolling the truce line from the 1950-53 Korean War.

In the White House meeting, Bush's foreign policy advisers debated how far the reclusive Kim's government was willing to go in what the Americans view as an effort to extract concessions from the United States. The Clinton administration gave North Korea fuel oil in exchange for promises in 1994 to end its nuclear program.

Ruling out another deal, McClellan said, "Let me make it clear that we will not negotiate in response to threats or broken commitments."

Some U.S. officials say they believe North Korea may be bluffing. They point out that the laboratory has not been activated and, more importantly, its spent fuel rods have not been removed in an effort to produce bomb-making material.

> **"We seek a peaceful resolution. I think for now we need to let the discussions happen with our friends and allies about the next steps that we take."**
>
> **— SCOTT McCLELLAN**
> White House spokesman

Even if North Korea takes those two steps, it is unclear whether Bush would consider attacking the laboratory or taking other military action, officials said.

The president already has stopped U.S.-backed fuel shipments, officials said, and seeking deeper economic sanctions could create a humanitarian crisis in the impoverished nation.

Bush's strategy for now is to make it clear to North Korea that he won't budge, and the only way to secure better relations, and eventually economic aid, is to keep its anti-nuclear pledge, officials said.

"The international community remains in agreement that North Korea's actions are a challenge to all responsible nations and has made clear that North Korea's relations with the outside world hinge on the elimination of its nuclear weapons program," McClellan said.

In another sign of tension, the U.S.-U.N. command overseeing the 49-year cease-fire between North and South Korea accused the North Koreans of placing light machine guns inside the demilitarized zone between the two countries six times during the last month.

On several days in December, South Korean troops saw North Korean soldiers setting up the machine guns, then taking them down at night, according to a statement from the U.S.-U.N. command. On Dec. 23, the U.N. command sent an inquiry to North Korea about the guns, but the North Koreans refused to accept it.

Some U.S. military officials said the move was unusual because the North Koreans were so overt in their placement of the guns, in plain view of South Korean troops, and suggested it was tied to the nuclear crisis. Others described it as a routine tactic by the North Korean army and said it was of little concern.

Bombing in Grozny



Associated Press/RTR via APTN

People carry a victim from the administration building in the Chechen capital Grozny, Friday, in this image made from television. Two powerful car bombs ripped through the Chechen government headquarters in the regional capital Grozny on Friday, and at least 25 people were killed, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported.

Iraq's improved biological weapons a serious threat

BY MATT KELLEY
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Biological weapons are among the few capabilities Iraq has improved since being defeated by a U.S.-led coalition in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, government officials say.

Working under the noses of U.N. inspectors from 1991 to 1998, President Saddam Hussein's government probably developed mobile germ warfare labs and processes to create dried bacteria for deadlier and longer-lasting weapons, U.S. officials and former weapons inspectors say.

Pentagon officials say Iraq's biological arsenal could do the most damage, physical and psychological, if it were used to retaliate immediately against a U.S. invasion rather than in later stages of battle.

Although U.S. troops are being vaccinated against anthrax and smallpox and have protective gear, a biological attack cannot be detected until after exposure. Even if a biological attack did not kill U.S. troops, it could kill many civilians and create a logistical mess that would slow an American advance and strain the military's medical capabilities.

"The most frightening thing is Iraq's biological program," said David Kay, a former chief weapons inspector for the United Nations. "Even in my inspection days, it was the program we knew the least about."

What inspectors eventually learned was disturbing. After the 1995 defection of Saddam's son-in-law, who ran the germ weapons program, Iraq acknowledged brewing thousands of gallons of deadly germs and toxins and loading some of them in bombs, missile warheads and rockets.

The weapons included anthrax, the germ that killed seven people in last year's U.S. mail attacks; botulinum toxin, nature's most deadly poison; Clostridium perfringens, a flesh-eating bacterium that causes gas gangrene; and aflatoxin, a fungal poison that causes liver cancer.

In late 1998, frustrated by Iraq's refusal to cooperate, the inspectors withdrew shortly before the United States and Britain began "Operation Desert Fox," a bombing campaign to compel compliance by Iraq. Saddam refused to let the inspectors return.

Iraq claimed it destroyed all its biological weapons. U.N. inspectors concluded in 1999 that probably was a lie, because Saddam's scientists could have made thousands of gallons of biological weapons without declaring them. U.S. officials say Iraq's latest weapons declaration does not clear up discrepancies.

"Before the inspectors were forced to leave Iraq, they concluded that Iraq could have produced 26,000 liters of anthrax. That is three times the amount Iraq had declared," Secretary of State Colin Powell said recently. "Yet the Iraqi declaration is silent on this stockpile, which alone would be enough to kill several million people."

The omissions, U.S. officials and former inspectors say, are strong evidence that Iraq has retained at least some of its biological arsenal.

Iraq's development of anthrax-drying technology makes that arsenal even more dangerous than it was during the Gulf War. Its earlier biological weapons efforts relied on a liquid slurry of anthrax, which let the spores clump together and made it difficult to get the fine aerosol needed to get the germs into people's lungs.

U.N. inspectors in the late 1990s found Iraq had drying machines that could be used to make a powdered form of anthrax.

The Iraqis claimed they were making a biological pesticide from a worm-killing bacteria known as BT, said former inspector Jonathan Tucker. But they were making particles so small they would float through the air, not settle onto crops like a biopesticide should, Tucker said. Inspectors believed Iraq was using BT, a relative of the anthrax germ, as a testing stand-in for anthrax, Tucker said.

Evidence also suggested that Iraq was experimenting with drying anthrax in combination with bentonite, a compound that would help the anthrax particles stay aloft. Iraq also has imported hundreds of tons of fumed silicon dioxide, another substance that would give anthrax an aerosol quality.

Dried anthrax is easier to disperse as a weapon, easier to get into a target's lungs and lasts longer in storage, Tucker and another former U.N. inspector, Richard Spertzel, said. Particles small enough could penetrate even the U.S. military's protective gear.

"Quite clearly, Iraq knew exactly what needed to be done," Spertzel said. "Their contract with the spray dryer company showed they knew what to go for and how to do it."

Although U.S. troops are inoculated against anthrax, a high enough concentration of anthrax spores still could make them sick, Tucker said.

"If you're exposed to a massive dose, it could overwhelm a vaccination," said Tucker, a senior fellow at the U.S. Institute of Peace.

Iraq has missiles that could carry biological weapons to Israel, Kuwait or U.S. troop concentrations within Iraq, Pentagon officials say.

Iraq also has experimented with turning small jet airplanes into remote-controlled drones. U.S. officials fear those drones could be fitted with spray tanks to deliver biological weapons.

"Iraq developed these drones because I think they realized their air force wouldn't be flying long if there was a war," Tucker said.

Motorists protest gas shortages in Venezuela

BY FABIOLA SANCHEZ
Associated Press Writer

CARACAS, Venezuela — Angry motorists protested at empty service stations Friday as Venezuela's government struggled to overcome fuel and food shortages caused by a general strike aimed at toppling President Hugo Chavez.

Despite the protests, Chavez declared in a nationally broadcast speech that, thanks to efforts by his government, the worst of Venezuela's energy crisis was over.

Long gas lines will disappear "in a few days, weeks," Chavez said as he condemned the strike, which he calls an "economic coup" against him.

About 1,000 Chavez supporters rallied Friday at the Supreme Court to urge justices to ban a proposed referendum on Chavez's presidency and declare the 26-day-old strike illegal.

Strike leaders reiterated that the walkout won't end until Chavez calls elections. "We won't allow this regime to install a dictatorship," said Carlos Ortega, head of Venezuela's largest labor confederation.

U.S. Ambassador Charles S. Shapiro met with Chavez on Friday and told reporters he was concerned that the political crisis and shortages could trigger violence. He called for "both sides to reach a sensible solution, a democratic solution, an electoral solution."

Meanwhile, government TV announcements urged viewers to apply for jobs at the state-owned oil monopoly, Petroleos de Venezuela S.A., or PDVSA, where 35,000 people are on strike.

Frustration mounted nationwide as drivers waited in mile-long lines for fuel.

Watched by dozens of rifle-toting soldiers, more than 100 motorists blocked an avenue outside a closed gas station in Caracas.

"I've been waiting in line since 6 o'clock in the morning. I can't work, I can't do anything until they allow us to fill up," said Cesar Hernandez, a 37-year-old electrician. "This strike is hurting us all."

"Be patient, please," pleaded Army Lt. Javier Hill, who told motorists they couldn't fill plastic containers for safety reasons. "Sorry, only vehicles."

The strike, called Dec. 2, has paralyzed Venezuela's oil industry, the world's No. 5 oil exporter and the No. 4 provider of crude to the United States. Crises here and in Iraq have have increased world oil prices, which closed at $32.72 a barrel Friday, and some analysts predict it could soon hit $35.

Ali Rodriguez, president of PDVSA, estimated oil revenue losses from the strike at more than $1.3 billion. He said 10 million barrels of crude were awaiting export.

Striking oil executives say production has dropped to 160,000 barrels per day — down from a pre-strike level of 3 million barrels a day.

Resultant shortages of gas, cooking gas and some food items have forced Venezuela to seek help from its neighbors.

Brazil has shipped 520,000 barrels of gasoline — little more than a normal day's supply — and Trinidad and Tobago was sending 400,000 barrels more. The Dominican Republic sent rice. Venezuela has asked Colombia for milk and meat.

Energy Minister Rafael Ramirez said new managers would soon reopen the giant PDVSA refinery in the Caribbean island of Curacao — shut down Dec. 17 — to produce 200,000 barrels of gasoline per day for Venezuelan use.

But striking oil executives said it would take 2.5 million barrels of gas in the system to meet and sustain domestic consumption.

Ramirez said the government was trying to bring into port seven Venezuelan tankers anchored off the coast by striking crews. The tankers carry leaded and unleaded gasoline, liquified natural gas, diesel and aviation fuel, he said.

Venezuelan labor, business and political leaders accuse Chavez of mismanaging the economy and trying to install a Cuban-style revolution in Venezuela. They want Chavez to schedule a nonbinding referendum on his rule for Feb. 2, hoping to pressure him to resign. The national elections council is organizing a vote over Chavez's objections.

The president says his opponents can only call a binding recall vote halfway into his six-year term, or next August, under the terms of the constitution.

During talks sponsored by the Organization of American States on Thursday, the government said it won't oppose a referendum if the Supreme Court upholds it.

SPORTS

Patriots' Super Bowl win chosen as story of year

BY HOWARD ULMAN
AP Sports Writer

The football flew through the flakes and between the uprights in the wintry New England night. Long-snapper Lonie Paxton flopped on his back and carved a snow angel in the field.

That celebration of the winning field goal in the Patriots' first playoff victory of 2002, in overtime over Oakland, wiped away a legacy of mediocrity.

Two weeks later, Adam Vinatieri kicked another last-play winner — this one in the warmth of the Superdome in the Super Bowl.

The Patriots' improbable rise from a 5-11, last-place team the previous season to Super Bowl champions was voted The Associated Press' Story of the Year by member newspapers and broadcasters.

It beat the story of baseball's labor dispute that ended with a new contract for players.

In the AP voting, the Patriots received 15 first-place votes and 486 points overall.

The baseball labor strife that ended Aug. 30, just 3 1/2 hours before a strike deadline, received the most first-place votes, 18, and 387 points, largely because the Patriots had a 19-7 edge in second-place votes.

Ten points were awarded for first place, down to one point for a 10th-place vote.

The figuring-skating judging scandal at the Winter Olympics finished third, followed by the first World Series victory for the Anaheim Angels, who beat the San Francisco Giants in seven games.

Rounding out the top 10 were Lance Armstrong winning a fourth straight Tour de France; the death of Ted Williams and the family dispute over whether the former Boston Red Sox slugger's body should be cryonically frozen or cremated; Emmitt Smith breaking Walter Payton's NFL rushing record; Serena Williams winning three Grand Slam tennis titles; Tiger Woods winning six golf tournaments and becoming the first player in 30 years to win the first two Grand Slams; and the World Cup in which the U.S. soccer team's quarterfinal appearance was its best showing since 1930.

The Patriots had their best year ever, beating heavily favored St. Louis 20-17 for the title on Feb. 3.

New England began last season with two losses and lost quarterback Drew Bledsoe in the second game with a serious chest injury. Bledsoe, who won just three playoff games in his first eight seasons, looked past his personal disappointment and tutored his replacement. It was indicative of the Patriots' team-oriented approach.

Enter Tom Brady. He was just a sixth-round draft choice from Michigan in 2000 who had thrown three NFL passes when — ready or not — he was thrust into Bledsoe's spot.

How could he lead the Patriots to the first NFL title in their 42-year history, winning the last nine games?

Brady's first game of 2002 was his easiest, a 38-6 romp over lowly Carolina. Brady threw for 198 yards and one touchdown, but Ty Law and Otis Smith returned interceptions for touchdowns.

That gave the Patriots an 11-5 record, the AFC East title and a first-round bye. And it ended a regular-season in which they won their last six games.

The Patriots had to overcome a 1-3 start, the possible distraction of Bledsoe losing his job, and suspensions that limited wide receiver Terry Glenn to four games.

Their first win with Brady as a starter showed he could lead a comeback. They beat San Diego 29-26 after trailing 26-16 with less than nine minutes left.

"Never a doubt, huh?" Brady said with relief. "I've had a lot of games in college that came down to the same situation. I sure hope there's bigger days ahead in bigger arenas."

There were plenty. But no one was prepared for the moment that prompted Paxton's angelic celebration in the snow.

On Jan. 19, New England trailed Oakland 13-10 with 1:43 left in the fourth quarter when Brady lost the ball and Oakland's Greg Biekert pounced on it. The officials ruled it a fumble but that was changed to an incompletion because Brady's arm was coming forward as he tried to tuck the ball away. It was one of many calls that went to the Patriots all season.

Vinatieri then tied the game with a difficult 45-yard field goal and won it with a 23-yarder, a memorable last play at Foxboro Stadium. It was torn down and replaced by Gillette Stadium, where the Patriots went into the final game of 2002 just hoping to make the playoffs.

But they were on a roll in January when they followed the Oakland victory by winning the AFC title in Pittsburgh, 24-17 on Jan. 27, as Bledsoe replaced an injured Brady and led them to victory.

"People can say what they want to say, talk about what we don't have, call us Cinderella and lucky and whatever else they want to call us, and I don't care," wide receiver Troy Brown said. "This game is over, we won — and we're going to the Super Bowl."

All their success didn't make the Patriots favorites in New Orleans, but they led 17-3 after three quarters. Then the Rams tied it, and the Patriots had no timeouts and just 1:21 left when they got the ball at their 17-yard line.

Brady, who would be named Super Bowl MVP, guided them into field-goal range.

Then, without any snow or any doubt, Vinatieri kicked a 48-yard field goal for the first final-play victory in Super Bowl history.

He leaped into the air. Players hugged. Paxton ran into the endzone where he did an even stranger snow angel — on artificial turf under the Superdome roof.



Kansas City Chiefs' defense sparkled against Raiders

BY JANIE MCCAULEY
AP Sports Writer

OAKLAND — The Oakland Raiders gave Kansas City's defense a serious confidence boost two months ago, and the Chiefs needed it badly.

The league's last-place defense held the NFL's top-rated offense to its lowest point total of the year in a 20-10 win at Arrowhead Stadium on Oct. 27. And the Chiefs don't hesitate to let people know about it.

They believe there's no reason they can't do it again Saturday, but they realize it will be a lot tougher with the rowdy Raider Nation going against them on every down.

This game also carries more importance for both teams. The Raiders (10-5), who won the AFC West for the third straight time, could secure home-field advantage through the playoffs, and the first-round bye that accompanies it, with a victory. The Chiefs (8-7) still can make the playoffs, which would snap a four-year postseason drought.

Raiders quarterback Rich Gannon put up big numbers in that loss to the Chiefs two months ago, completing 35 of 55 passes for 334 yards, but he couldn't get his team into the end zone often enough. It was the third defeat in Oakland's four-game losing streak.

"I think we got after them pretty good up front," said Chiefs linebacker Mike Maslowski, who needs six tackles to break the franchise single-season record of 157 set by Gary Spani in 1979.

"We put some good pressure on Gannon and made him make some quick decisions, didn't let him sit back and scan the field and choose who he wanted to go to. We played hard, we played physical. It was pretty evenly matched, and we got the best of it at the end."

That same defense had blown double-digit fourth-quarter leads in bitter losses the two previous weeks. Against the Raiders, however, the defense set up the clinching touchdown when Maslowski forced a fumble by Jerry Rice and recovered the ball with 4:39 left.

The win was the first for the Chiefs over the Raiders in six games.

Stopping Gannon this time will be just as difficult. He set an NFL record last week against the Broncos for the most completions in a season with 411, and if he has a spectacular passing game Saturday, he could put another prestigious record next to his name. He needs 390 yards to become the second quarterback to pass for 5,000 in a season. Dan Marino had 5,084 in 1984.

"Their front seven is playing very well right now and they're a very aggressive group, with a lot of team speed up front," the 37-year-old Gannon said. "They're very solid. We've just got our work cut out for us."

Gannon hasn't lost any faith in Oakland's creative and gutsy offensive system, despite low numbers the past two weeks.

"It's a system that's been very productive for us," he said. "However, if you make mistakes or make mental errors and you're not clean in your performance, then it's tough."

The Raiders implemented more rushing plays to beat Denver last week. During one series, they ran the ball six straight times.

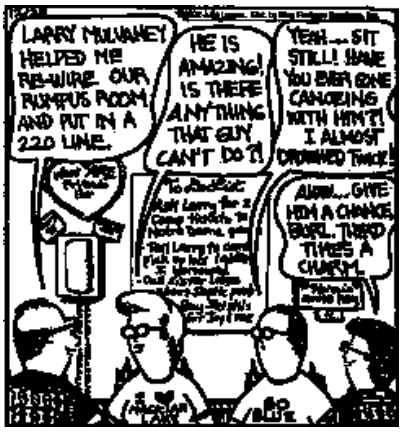
"Now they create more problems for you," Chiefs coach Dick Vermeil said. "Gannon just runs that whole group so well. He controls the pulse rate of the offense, if not the entire football team.

"He's a competitive guy who takes advantage of all his talent and hasn't made many mistakes this year. Very few. He's the magician that makes it all work."

The Chiefs wish they had already secured a playoff spot, but they also believe playing in such a big game in the season's final weekend will be exciting.

COMICS

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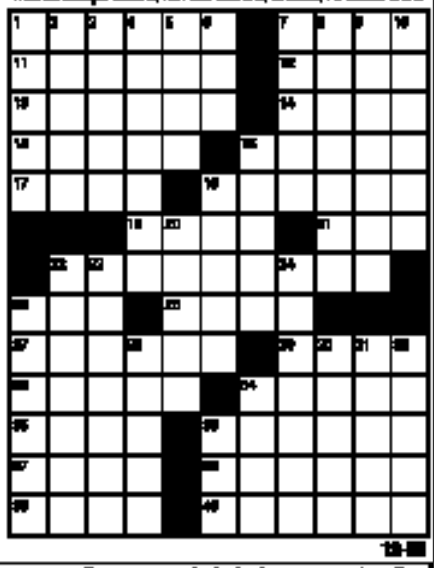
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20 Cheers
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23 Former
24 Deteriorate
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28 Sped
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32 Top celebs
34 Cager Archibald
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NEWS OF THE WEIRD

by Chuck Shepard

Patrol officer shoots himself in the foot

Capt. Van Fussell, a Florida Highway Patrol district commander in Venice, Fla., accidentally shot himself in the foot as he was holstering his Glock pistol while taking his annual firearms test in November. (He'll have to take it over.) And the previous week in Brooksville, Fla., homeowner Jimmy Batten walked in on Sean Todd Duval, 26, who had apparently broken in to steal Batten's guns. Batten was puzzled that Duval did not try to run away, but the reason was that minutes earlier, Duval had accidentally shot his left middle toe off with one of the guns and was so despondent that he told Batten: "Finish me off. Go ahead and blow my brains out."



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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.

MAGICOPOLIS presents HOCUS POCUS! (Fish Bones Choke Us). The stage explodes with a colorful mix of Magic, Special Effects, Sleight of Hand, Comedy and Music that's sure to delight audiences of all ages. At MAGICOPOLIS, 1418 Fourth Street, Santa Monica. Fridays & Saturdays at 8pm, $20. Saturday & Sundays at 2pm, $15. For tickets call 310-451-2241.

Music Showcase. UnUrban Coffeehouse. 3301 Pico Blvd., Santa Monica, (310)315-0056.

The Red Ribbon Squares, Santa Monica's official square dance club, invites you to enjoy an evening of plus level square dancing, alternating with round dancing, with an A-1 tip during break time. We dance every Saturday at Marine Park from 7:45pm to 10:30pm. Pre-rounds begin at 7:15pm. Admission is $5 for dancers, including refreshments. Spectators are free. For more information, please call (310)395-3383

SUNDAY

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.

Puppetolio! presented by the Santa Monica Puppet & Magic Center. All ages, 3 and up. This musical revue features marionettes, ventriloquism, magic and more. Shows are always followed by a demonstration, Q & A, and a tour of the Puppet workshop and Museum. Saturdays and Sundays at 1pm and 3pm. Wednesdays and Holidays at 1pm. Seats are $6.50. 1255 2nd Street in Santa Monica. Reservations/Information (310)656-0483. www.puppetmagic.com

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Almost Vaudville. 2 pm and 5 pm. UnUrban Coffeehouse. 3301 Pico Blvd., Santa Monica, (310)315-0056.

MOVIE °GUIDE

LOEWS CINIPLEX BROADWAY CINEMA
1441 Third St. at Broadway
About Schmidt (R) 12:40, 3:40, 6:40, 9:40. **Two Weeks Notice** (PG-13) 12:00, 2:30, 5;00, 7:30, 10:10. **Antwone Fisher** (PG-13) 1:20. 4:20, 7:20, 10:20. **The Hours** (PG-13) 1:00, 4:00, 7:00, 10:00.

MANN CRITERION
1313 Third St.
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (PG) 11:30, 3:15, 7:05, 10:30. **Treasure Planet** (PG) 12:00. **The Hot Chick** (PG-13) 2:30, 5:00, 7:45, 10:10. **Gangs of New York** (R) 11:15,12:15, 3:00, 4:15, 7:10, 8:15, 10:40. **Narc** (R) 11:00, 1:45, 4:30, 7:15, 10:00.

AMC THEATRE SM 7
1310 3rd Street
Die Another Day (PG-13) 11:35, 9:50. **Drumline** (PG-13) 10:30, 4:40. **Maid in Manhattan** (PG-13) 11:45, 2:20, 4:55, 7:35, 10:05. **Star Trek: Nemesis: with Captions** (PG-13) 12:05, 2:45, 5:15, 8:00, 10:40. **The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers** (PG-13) 11:15, 2:20, 3:05, 6:15, 7:05, 10:15, 11:00. **Catch Me If You Can** (PG-13) 10:15, 12:00, 1:20. 3:20, 4:35, 6:45, 7:50, 10:00, 11:00.

LANDMARK NU-WILSHIRE
1314 Wilshire Blvd.
Bowling for Columbine (R) 1:30, 4:15, 7:30, 10:15. **Far From Heaven** (PG-13) 2:00, 4:30, 7:00, 9:30.

LAEMMLE MONICA
1332 2nd St.
Pinocchio (NR) 1:45, 4:20, 7:00, 9:40. **Frida** (R) 1:45, 4:30, 7:15, 10:05. **Sonny (R)** 1:20, 4:10, 7:00, 9:50. **Max** (R) 1:30, 4:35, 7:25, 10:05.

Calendar items are printed free of charge as a service to our readers. Please submit your items to todayspaper@smdp.com for consideration. Calendar events are limited by space, and will be run at the discretion of the Calendar Editor.

BACK PAGE

THE REAL WORLD

Volume argument

By The Associated Press

BLUFFTON, S.C. — A woman was accused of stabbing her boyfriend after the two got into an argument over the volume from their television set, police said.

Nakara Sentrese Simmons, 24, has been arrested and charged with assault and battery with intent to kill after authorities said she stabbed Ron Gadson, 28, with a kitchen knife Wednesday.

"She was trying to go to bed and he was watching TV in another room," Beaufort County Sheriff's Master Sgt. Chris Sankowski said Thursday. "There was a verbal argument about the volume."

As the argument grew more heated, Simmons reportedly stabbed Gadson once in the upper torso, Sankowski said.

Gadson was in stable condition at Memorial Health University Medical Center in Savannah, Ga. Simmons was released Thursday from the Beaufort County Detention Center. Officials would not provide details.

Holiday town

By The Associated Press

CHRISTMAS, Mich. — Every day is a holiday in this Upper Peninsula community, but the Yuletide season is something special.

Staff at Christmas Mall and Cabins know that better than most, as each year they accommodate the throngs who come here to have their envelopes stamped with the town's unique postmark.

"Every year we get more and more," said Joe Beauchaine, part owner of the business. Over the past six years, more than 100,000 pieces of mail received the Christmas postmark.

Karen and Joe Beauchaine began marking mail in 1997, after they bought the business. That year, they stamped 11,218 pieces.

This year, nearly 20,000 postmarks were stamped by Christmas Eve, a new record for the outlying branch office of the U.S. Postal Service, The Mining Journal of Marquette reported.

"We have pickup twice a day now because of the amount of mail," Beauchaine said. "We have so much going out of here, we fill up crates."

Customers from as far away as Hawaii, Florida, California and Canada drop off cards and other correspondence to be postmarked Christmas.

After Thanksgiving each year, mail flow through the post office runs up to 2,000 pieces per day, mostly holiday cards. Mall workers say postmarking creates a lot of extra work, but it's worth the effort.

"We do enjoy doing it," Beauchaine said.

Robot deer

By The Associated Press

PANAMA CITY, Fla. — Tales of Rudolph of red-nose fame, Dasher, Prancer and Santa's other tiny reindeer dominate at Christmas time, but have you heard of the strangest deer of all?

He's Robo Deer. The mechanical decoy helps Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission officers nab poachers and deter the illegal shooting of Rudolph's real-life cousins at night and from vehicles.

The stories of his exploits have multiplied since 1995 when the agency began using the devices. Robo Deer follows in the hoof-steps of a couple less realistic versions. The first was a cardboard cutout with some burlap on it.

"It was worth maybe $2," commission Lt. Stan Kirkland said. "It was amazing how many people shot at it."

Next was a deer replica similar to those archers can buy as practice targets, but it had no moving parts.

Then came Robo Deer, which can turn its head and twitch its tail. The stories quickly followed.

"We had an officer report there was someone in a truck watching the replica," Kirkland said. "He took a long gaze and then floorboarded his vehicle. He ran through these pines and oaks, ran over the decoy, and destroyed it."

The motorist had to buy the state a replacement.

Another driver just missed running over it.

"Then the guy all of the sudden slammed on the brakes, vaults out of the truck, takes out a big sheath knife, tackles it, and knocks it to the ground," Kirkland said. "The head rolls off."

The man got up mumbling about game officers and drove off. No arrest was made because there's nothing illegal about tackling a deer.

Another man saw the deer and stopped his truck, got out and crawled on his belly across a ditch filled with water to within 20 feet.

"You'd think by now he'd get the message when this thing doesn't run that it's not real," Kirkland said. "He reaches back into his pocket, whips out this little pistol you couldn't kill a snake with, and plinks away at the decoy."

As the arrests grew, so did the legend. Officers get calls from people claiming they spotted Robo Deer, much like Elvis, in places he's never been.

"A lot of them want to us to know we didn't fool them," Kirkland said. "Then they want to know how we're able to get him to jump fences. That's when we just grin and bear it and say 'It's a secret, and we can't discuss that.'"

