

FREE

Santa Monica Daily Press

A newspaper with issues

Parents press on for education



BY RYAN HYATT

Daily Press Staff Writer

SACRAMENTO — Thousands of parents demanding more money for public education were met with deaf ears last week when they marched onto the steps of the Capitol.

About 100 Santa Monicans joined up with thousands of California parents in Sacramento to demand Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger make the failing public school system a top state priority.

Gov. Schwarzenegger, however, didn't meet with the state's public education advocates, according to the rally's organizers.

The two-day rally, called "Caravan for Kids," included a pit stop at Gov. Schwarzenegger's office in Los Angeles last Wednesday, followed by the statewide protest on the Capitol steps in Sacramento on Thursday. The event was organized by Santa

David Hume Kennerly/Special to the Daily Press

Maria Rodriguez, president of the Santa Monica-Malibu PTA, speaks in Los Angeles during last week's 'Caravan for Kids' rally.

See EDUCATION, page 6

DAILY LOTTERY

SUPER LOTTO

11 15 28 36 37
Meganumber: 15
Jackpot: \$... Million

FANTASY 5

8 13 14 17 34

DAILY 3

Daytime: 4 0 6
Evening: 9 7 9

DAILY DERBY

1st: 12 Lucky Charms
2nd: 09 Winning Spirit
3rd: 02 Lucky Star

RACE TIME: 1:41.94

NEWS OF THE WEIRD
BY CHUCK SHEPARD

After several incidents of teacher-student sex in Florida, it was almost a relief in January that Perry, Fla., teacher Natalie Whalen, 58, was accused only of biting a student (who had tried to take a CD player from her desk) or that, in February, Orlando high school chemistry teacher Perry Pieski, 42, was accused only of teaching his class how to make a bomb. But the crisis returned in March when a man revealed in a divorce deposition that not only had he had trysts with his son's Boynton Beach elementary school music teacher, Carol Flannigan, but so had the son.

TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is the 124th day of 2005.
There are 241 days left in the year.

On May 4, 1945, during World War II, German forces in the Netherlands, Denmark and northwest Germany agreed to surrender.

In 1927, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences was founded.

In 1961, a group of "Freedom Riders" left Washington for New Orleans to challenge racial segregation in interstate buses and bus terminals.

In 1970, Ohio National Guardsmen opened fire on anti-war protesters at Kent State University, killing four students and wounding nine others.

In 1980, Marshal Josip Broz Tito, president of Yugoslavia, died three days before his 88th birthday.

THOUGHT OF THE DAY

"When your work speaks for itself, don't interrupt."

HENRY J. KAISER
AMERICAN INDUSTRIALIST (1882-1967)

INDEX

Horoscopes

Private time tonight, Taurus 2

Surf Report

Water temperature: 60° 3

Opinion

The disgrace of Internet porn 4

State

San Francisco is top dog 7

National

A finger in frozen custard 9

Comics

Laugh it up 17

Classifieds

Ad space odyssey 18-19

Woman struck by bus still a 'Jane Doe'

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON
Daily Press Staff Writer

The identity is not yet known of a woman who was killed after being struck by a Big Blue Bus last week.

The Los Angeles Department of the Coroner has not yet conducted an autopsy on the Hispanic woman, who is believed to be in her 40s and possibly either a transient or an illegal immigrant, said Lt. Cheryl MacWillie, who works in the coroner's office. Investigators also haven't been able to contact her family, which leaves her identity still unknown.

"We have requested a report from the Santa Monica Police Department," MacWillie said. "We're still trying to get the details."

At about 7:55 a.m. on Friday, April 29, the bus was driving west-

See DEATH, page 7

Court orders apartment building to be razed

BY RYAN HYATT
Daily Press Staff Writer

SUNSET PARK — An apartment building in Santa Monica plagued with code violations has been ordered by the court to be demolished.

Beverly Hills Superior Court Judge Lisa Hart Cole on Monday approved a recommendation by a court-appointed receiver that the apartment building at 2438 Ocean Park Blvd. be razed to the ground.

Judge Cole in January appointed Century City-based attorney David Pasternak to take control of the property and determine whether it could conform to health and safety codes, or if it was in such disrepair that it needed to be demolished. The process is known as a "receivership."

Shortly after, the building's owner, Guillermo Gonzalez, filed an appeal to deny allowing Pasternak to be the court-appointed receiver. Pasternak assumed full control of the property in January. The three-unit building is still being occupied by Gonzalez,



John Wood/Daily Press

Guillermo Gonzalez and his wife, Beatriz Zustovich, still live in the apartment building at 2438 Ocean Park Blvd., which a judge has ordered demolished.

55. "This is an American dream, to have a house, and now that I have one, they want to take it away from me," Gonzalez said.

In her Monday ruling, Judge Cole allowed the demolition to be delayed until Gonzalez' appeal is

resolved. It's not known how long the appeal process will take. Judge Cole set a status conference for Gonzalez' appeal on Aug. 11.

City Hall for years has been citing Gonzalez after several neigh-

See VIOLATION, page 6

Jacquie Banks

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California schools among the worst in nation

EDUCATION, from page 1

Monica's Community for Excellent Public Schools and the Santa Monica-Malibu PTA, which called on the statewide PTA to join in their effort.

"Caravan for Kids" organizers said they hope their efforts will prompt Gov. Schwarzenegger to make good on a promise made last year to increase public education funding, protect Proposition 98 school money and develop a 10-year plan to restore the greatness California's schools once enjoyed.

Organizers said Carla Niño, president to the California PTA, asked to discuss the educational budget with Gov. Schwarzenegger a month ago. Gov. Schwarzenegger's office called a day before the rallies were scheduled to take place and invited the PTA leadership to meet with his staff. Niño allegedly denied the invitation on the grounds she felt the matter required the direct attention of Gov. Schwarzenegger.

H.D. Palmer, deputy director of the state's department of finance, said Gov.

Schwarzenegger is committed to significant yearly increases to make up for the \$9 billion public education funding gap inherited when he took office.

Palmer said the educational budget Gov. Schwarzenegger is proposing more than covers expected growth of student enrollment.

The \$47 billion education budget will increase \$3 billion, mostly from Prop. 98 money. The added funds will increase per student spending by \$362 for next year, from \$7,012 to \$7,374.

However, local advocacy groups said the proposal is not enough to get California's public schools back where they need to be.

"The governor will meet with leaders who represent far fewer constituents," said Rochelle Fanali, a CEPS member who helped organize the rally. "For the governor to not stand with the California PTA when the education budget is being hotly debated does not seem fair."

A recent report published by the RAND Corp., a Santa Monica-based international think tank, said California's

K-12 school system has fallen from its position as the national leader it was 30 years ago to near the bottom of the rankings, above just Mississippi and Louisiana.

CEPS representatives said after the local school district earlier this month secured an annual \$6 million contribution from the Santa Monica City Council for the next five years — to offset the local impact from the state budget crisis — CEPS members have begun to focus their attention on the statewide educational financing crisis.

"Organizing the statewide effort was probably the most natural thing for us to do, since we've become used to maximizing our resources," Fanali said. "But it's been a little like shoveling snow, since the governor is denying the state's responsibility."

Despite the \$6 million annual subsidy, plus many more millions in other funding each year by City Hall, local school officials have said that four years of educational budget cuts on the state level have cost local schools nearly \$9 million in lost services and personnel, resulting in a

reduction of administrators, staff, faculty and the support for programs. "Caravan for Kids" organizers said the problem is worse for schools without local support.

Maria Rodriguez, president of the Santa Monica-Malibu PTA Council, said her group has done everything it can to drum up local support. She said the PTA has a responsibility to all children in the state of California — many of whom belong to schools that have not had the same level of local support as the Santa Monica-Malibu school system.

Overall, CEPS and local PTA representatives said they are happy with the outcome of the rally, since it has allowed them to meet education advocates statewide, which may help with future organization efforts.

"We're pleased with what we were able to accomplish," said Rebecca Kennerly, a CEPS member and event organizer. "It has been a huge mobilization. There are a number of groups out there that are eager to take local advocacy up to the state, where the root of our education problems lie."

City has never taken home for health violations, attorney says

VIOLATION, from page 1

bors complained the property was overrun with garbage, flammable materials and junk, and that a single upstairs bedroom had some 14 bunkbeds rented out by the week — an allegation that Gonzalez denied.

In 1997, Gonzalez was charged with 85 misdemeanor counts for violations of building, fire, plumbing and electrical codes, and has had ongoing legal problems since then, according to Deputy City Attorney Adam Radinsky, who is handling the case on behalf of Santa

Monica's consumer protection unit. Radinsky said Gonzalez has repeatedly refused court orders to fix a host of code violations, landing him in county jail for nine months in 1998.

Pasternak advised the court in papers he filed that the cost of repairing the property and bringing it up to code was prohibitively high and that the property would be worth more empty than with a repaired building, according to Radinsky.

Making that determination required several inspections, contractor estimates and assessments from real estate agents, according to Pasternak, adding the costs will be paid for by Gonzalez, who likely will either have to sell his property or refinance his mortgage.

Pasternak said Gonzalez and the building's other tenants will be allowed to stay in the building — for now.

Gonzalez, a retired construction worker, has lived in the building for 31 years, which city officials called a "dangerous blight to the community" that has been "the site of chronic criminal activity" as a result of Gonzalez' alleged negligence in dealing with the matter.

In addition to the code violations, Radinsky said there had been 32 calls to police within a one-year period for complaints related to excessive noise and other alleged criminal wrongdoing.

Gonzalez credited a disgruntled neighbor with making the calls.

Gonzalez said the front unit in which he lives has five occupants, he and his common-law wife, Beatriz Zustovich, and their 5-year-old daughter, Stacy.

In addition to Gonzalez and his family, two renters pay between \$50 and \$65 a week to rent bunk beds in a large upstairs bedroom. Another family of three pays \$650 monthly to rent the building's rear unit, Gonzalez said.

Tracy Condon, a spokeswoman for the Rent Control Board, said the building is not under rent control because its owner lives in it and he filed for an exemption in 1980.

Gonzalez said he was emotionally



John Wood/Daily Press

The apartment building at 2438 Ocean Park Blvd. will not be razed until its owner's appeal is resolved by the court.

attached to the property, where he's lived since 1973 and where he raised his first son, who has since moved out. The apartment building was built in 1947.

City Hall has not sought to take control of a property from its owner for more than 15 years and has never done so for health and safety code violations, Radinsky said. However, Radinsky warned it can happen.

Gonzalez insists he has taken care of the code violations and his home is fit for living.

"This house is better than ever," Gonzalez said. "It's a little depressing, because I've been helping the homeless, and now they want to put the homeless and my family on the street."

Gonzalez said he is not sure where he will go if he has to leave his home, but he said he would prefer to be in Santa Monica, which his wife, Beatriz, said will be unlikely.

"It's too expensive here," she said.

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