

Tomorrow's Weather

HIGH 99
LOW 65

See expanded weather on Page 2

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Pampa News photo by Julie Anne Thompson

The 236 graduates of the class of 2008 wait for the ceremony to begin.

PHS graduates 236 on Saturday

The Pampa High School senior graduation for the class of 2008 was held Saturday, May 31 at Harvester Stadium. There were 236 graduates total in attendance and Principal Danny Seabourn presided.

"After graduating, our class will take 236 different paths," Valedictorian Kristen Dunn said. "There will be many and diverse approaches to these paths."

The Pledge of Allegiance and Invocation was lead by Valerie Rushing followed by the Pampa High Band and Concert Choir's rendition of 'Battle Hymn of the Republic.'

Salutatorian Kayla Mendoza then stood to make her speech to her fellow graduates. She spoke of memories made and relationships forged as well as the construction project which had

become a theme for the class of '08.

"Who would have thought that our passing periods would be sounded by airhorns and the victory bell," Mendoza said.

The victory bell is normally used to signal a touchdown for the Harvester football team. Mendoza spoke with a fondness of the excitement of Friday night football games which she said she would always remember.

"As we go our separate ways, I hope we can stay in touch," Mendoza said.

Following Mendoza's speech, a senior jazz combo entitled "The New Road" was performed by Greg Wariner, Kristopher Boyd, Mitchell Bromlow, Brenden Carpenter, Tyler Dodson, Jesse Finney, Joseph Johnson, Michael May, Kayla Mendoza and Erica

Schepp. The number was composed by Wariner. It was then time for Valedictorian Kristen Dunn to address her class.

"As an Ag teacher's daughter and FFA member I've taken part in many meetings," Dunn said. "Our meeting has spanned over the last 13 years and at 10 o'clock we finally began our closing ceremonies."

She posed the question: How do you define success? Dunn

added that she knew it was different for each of them.

"The positive outcomes we See GRADUATION, Page 2



Pampa News photo by Julie Anne Thompson
Graduate Valerie Rushing leads the Pledge of Allegiance and Invocation.



Pampa News photo by Julie Anne Thompson

The Pampa High Concert Choir under the direction of Fred Mays and Wanetta Hill joined the Pampa High Band in a rendition of "Battle Hymn of the Republic."

Plane found in Lake Meredith

By David Bowser
The Pampa News

LAKE MEREDITH -- Recovery efforts are expected to begin today for a plane that has been missing for almost a quarter of a century.

Under clear blue skies and light winds on a clear winter afternoon, Jan. 27, 1984, pilot Steven Lampe with Larry Lucas, both Amarillo men, took off from Tradewind Airport in Amarillo in a Beechcraft single-engine plane and disappeared over Lake Meredith.

National Park Service officials at Lake Meredith said today that in 1984, investigators were unable to conclusively determine that the plane had gone into the lake. There are no known witnesses to the crash.

Friday afternoon, John Ware, 18, and Greg Daly, 16, both of Fritch, were canoeing when they came across the wreckage of their plane near Harbor Bay here at Lake Meredith.

National Park Service rangers said wreckage of the plane was visible because of low lake level. The level of Lake Meredith Friday, according to officials with the Canadian River Municipal Water Authority was 47.33 feet. Officials estimated the depth of the lake at the time of the plane's disappearance at about twice that.

Major Mary Tnuelen, spokesman for the Civil Air Patrol at the time, reported in 1984 that a 25-year-old pilot had rented a Beech Skipper two-seater airplane at Tradewind Airport in Amarillo. Although Lampe, who was reported to be experienced and responsible, never filed a flight plan, he flew off with Lucas, 23, about 2:30 p.m. that Friday, Jan. 27, 1984, telling airport officials that he planned to return in a couple of hours.

The two men in the tan-colored airplane with brown trim never returned.

The Civil Air Patrol launched a search for the plane the next day, Saturday, Jan. 29.

A fisherman found a nose wheel to the plane and some hydraulic lines that Saturday morning.

CAP officials reported picking up intermittent signals from an emergency transmitter they suspected being from the small plane, but were unable to pinpoint

See PLANE, Page 3

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Triangle Well Service celebrated 60 years in business last week with an open house and cookout for friends and customers. From left - Debbie Hoover, president, David Pedersen, employee and Judy Hoover enjoy the festivities at the 60th anniversary celebration.

Pampa News photo by Redonn Woods

State's disbanded air fleet still shuttling officials

AUSTIN (AP) — State officials and bureaucrats are still using a state airplane fleet to shuttle them around the country, even though Texas leaders tried to disband the fleet to save taxpayer dollars five years ago.

Officeholders including Gov. Rick Perry use the service to fly to meetings, award ceremonies, funerals and even a neighboring GOP governor's inauguration. Flyers say they look at cost and efficiency before deciding whether to use the aircraft, which range from \$258.75 to \$977.50 per flight-hour.

But critics question the necessity of the fleet, since bills are often footed by taxpayers and commercial airfare may be cheaper.

"It sure does raise the eyebrows and make the nose crinkle a bit," said Michael Quinn Sullivan of Texans for Fiscal Responsibility. "Between two really good Texas-based airlines, there's any number of options to get from anywhere to anywhere by air pretty quickly."

Then-Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn and Perry talked about selling the planes during the 2003 budget crunch.

But the Texas Department of Transportation, which oversees the fleet, expects it to log 1,227 more flight hours this two-year budget period than last. The planes are expected to fly a total of 3,350 hours at a cost of \$2.3 million this budget cycle.

"State agencies have seen the value of our services as an effective business tool," said Texas Department of

Transportation spokesman Chris Lippincott, noting the cost to fly on commercial airlines "continues to rise and its reliability continues to deteriorate."

In choosing a state plane, officials say they consider factors including the number of people traveling, availability of commercial flights and whether the costs and delays of overnight stays can be avoided.

Many of the trips are paid by the state, including a \$3,962 trip by Perry, a staffer and a member of his security detail to Baton Rouge for the inauguration of Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal, a fellow Republican.

An online booking service currently shows round-trip commercial flights for less than half of what the state paid for the Louisiana trip: \$480 per person or \$1,458 for three people. Perry spokeswoman Allison Castle noted Perry's schedule and commercial flight schedules play into such decisions.

Perry, who heads the Republican Governors Association, spoke at the prayer breakfast.

"I'd want to know, did he go to (Democratic New Mexico Gov.) Bill Richardson's inauguration?" asked state Rep. Jim Dunnam of Waco, head of the House Democratic Caucus. "If he didn't go to Richardson's, I think it's pretty apparent this is a partisan political trip. If he's going to do that, he ought to do it on his own dime. ... Taxpayers shouldn't pay for it."

Perry spokesman Robert Black dismissed the idea that

the trip was political.

"Most Texans recognize that the states of Louisiana and Texas have a unique relationship that has grown out of the natural disasters that happened a few years ago," Black said.

Perry's Baton Rouge trip was among a slew of state-airplane records covering the six months ending in March examined by the San Antonio Express-News and Houston Chronicle.

Among officials and departments using state money to pay for flights and billed more than \$20,000 apiece for the time period were Perry (\$24,537); Attorney General Greg Abbott and staff (\$21,943); TxDOT (\$130,568); the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (\$56,560) and Agriculture Commissioner Todd Staples and staff (\$50,302).

Destinations included memorial services for Texas Transportation Commission chairman Ric Williamson and for Kate Marmion, granddaughter of former Gov. Dolph Briscoe. Officials also flew to meetings on the controversial Trans-Texas Corridor by transportation officials.

Three state senators flew state planes during the six-month period examined: Sens. Carlos Uresti, D-San Antonio, Robert Duncan, R-Lubbock, and Kip Averitt, R-Waco. Uresti racked up the largest bill of the three at \$13,009 for trips to Marfa, Del Rio, Eagle Pass and Laredo.

Plane

Continued from Front Page

the location before it faded.

Some 10 planes and almost two dozen people searched the lake, primarily in the Harbor Bay and Fritch Fortress area, but found nothing.

The search continued Sunday, Jan. 29, as gusty winds kicked up white caps on the lake. As boats with sonar and National Park Service divers searched the

muddy water, foot patrols walked the shoreline looking for clues to what might have happened to the plane.

Hutchinson County Deputy Bob Smith said the visibility in the lake was terrible. The National Park Service divers reported visibility underwater was about 10 feet.

While the air temperature was in the 50-degree range, the water temperature was

reported to be 36 degrees.

A leather jacket was found floating in the lake the morning of Monday, Jan. 30, but officials said they could not determine if it belonged to either of the men on the plane.

National Park Service officials said more information would be available later today.

Ex-forest worker freed in FW after term for worst Colorado fire

DENVER (AP) — A former U.S. Forest Service worker was released from federal prison on Monday after serving a six-year term for starting the worst wildfire in Colorado's recorded history.

Terry Lynn Barton, 44, was released from a prison in Fort Worth, Texas, said Juan Segovia, a spokesman for the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

Barton, 44, pleaded guilty to state and federal arson charges stemming from the 2002 Hayman Fire, which blackened 138,000 acres, destroyed 133 homes and forced more than 8,000 people to evacuate.

She was a fire spotter for the U.S. Forest Service at the time and originally claimed she had found an illegal campfire and tried to extinguish it. She later admitted setting the fire by burning a letter from her estranged husband.

Barton served 6-year state and federal terms concurrently. She has been ordered to pay \$42.2 million in state and federal restitution, but the terms of that obligation were not immediately known.

Spell checker runs amok

MIDDLETOWN, Pa. (AP) — A computer spell-checker run amok christened several Pennsylvania high school students with new — and in some cases unflattering — last names.

Middletown Area High School's yearbook listed Max Zupanovic as "Max Supernova," Kathy Carbaugh as "Kathy Airbag" and Alessandra Ippolito as "Alexandria Impolite," just to name a few.

"It was kind of funny, but kind of rude at the same time," Ippolito said.

The mistakes were found on four of the yearbook's 176 pages, co-editor Amanda Gummo said.

Ed Patrick of Dallas-based Taylor Publishing, which printed the book, said his company is responsible for the errors and will provide free stickers printed with the correct names.

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Viewpoints

Texas Tales: Outlaw Newman's sad end ...

Outlaw Bud Newman apparently believed himself bullet-proof, figuratively and even literally.

After all, he had beaten the rap after killing a man in a gun battle in 1895 and then gotten acquitted of robbing a Southern Pacific train near Comstock two years later. Not only had Newman come off Scott-free, he had made a few bucks for his effort.

Evidently, the 23-year-old Newman believed he could do better. Not better as in going straight, but better in terms of making a bigger score.

About 11 p.m. on June 9, 1898, at a point called Coleman Switch about 4 miles west of Santa Anna, Newman and three other masked men descended on a

Santa Fe passenger train that had stopped there to switch tracks on its run from Brownwood to San Angelo. The other three robbers were later identified as Pierce Keaton and Bill and Jeff Taylor, brothers.

After getting the drop on the train's engineer, some of the gunman escorted the engineer and fireman Lee Johnson to the always-locked express car and told Johnson to have the messenger open up. Staring into a gun barrel, the fireman did as told.

Newman and company planned to blast open the money safe with dynamite once the messenger let them inside.

Unfortunately for the fireman and the robbers, an

armed Santa Fe livestock agent riding in one of the passenger cars snapped to the robbery attempt and alighted from the train with .45 blazing.

A general firefight erupted. Johnson crumpled with a gut shot that would prove fatal.

Newman took a slug in his right arm while a bone-shattering ball thudded into Keaton's right leg.

Sans money, the robbers mounted their horses with varying degrees of ease and galloped off into the night.

They pretty much kept riding until they reached Sutton

County, 125-miles to the southwest. That's where the Taylor family had a ranch.

Meanwhile, back at the crime scene, the train crew put the wounded fireman on board and backed into Santa Anna. A day later, Johnson died.

Lawmen from all over that part of West Texas rushed to Coleman County. The investigation was made easier by the fact that in their haste to escape, the would-be robbers had left behind their dynamite. While fingerprint technology had not yet become a forensic tool, the packages containing the

explosives bore advertisements from merchants in San Angelo and Sonora. On top of that, the tracks left behind by the fleeing bandits lay in the direction of Sutton County.

Tom Green County Sheriff Gerome Shield telephoned the Sutton County sheriff and asked him to see if the retailer in Sonora remembered who he sold the dynamite to. The Sonora lawman soon had a name. Led by Shield and a deputy U.S. marshal, a multi-agency posse soon headed toward the Taylor Ranch. Without much trouble, Newman and his colleagues were arrested.

Apparently figuring he could game the system one more time, Newman later

agreed to flip for the state in exchange for immunity. On his damning testimony, Keaton and Jeff Taylor got 99 years to do for the murder of the fireman and another eight for the attempted robbery — more years by far than either had to spare.

Bill Taylor got convicted of participating in the botched holdup and awaited trial on the murder charge when he managed to escape from the Coleman County Jail.

Knowing that Taylor would be getting in touch with the now-free Newman, officers got Newman to convince Taylor that he planned another train robbery back in Comstock. Taylor fell for it

See COX, Page 5

Mike Cox
Columnist



Today in History

By The Associated Press

Today is Monday, June 2, the 154th day of 2008. There are 212 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 2, 1953, Queen Elizabeth II of Britain was crowned in Westminster Abbey, 16 months after the death of her father, King George VI.

On this date:

In 1857, English composer Edward Elgar was born near Worcester, England.

In 1886, President Grover Cleveland married Frances Folsom in a White House ceremony.

In 1897, Mark Twain, 61, was quoted by the New York Journal as saying from London that "the report of my death was an exaggeration."

'Experience isn't interesting till it begins to repeat itself — in fact, till it does that, it hardly is experience.'

— Elizabeth Bowen
Irish-born author
(1899-1973)

In 1924, Congress passed a measure that was then signed by President Coolidge granting American citizenship to all U.S.-born American Indians.

In 1941, baseball's "Iron Horse," Lou Gehrig, died in New York of a degenerative disease, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis; he was 37.

In 1946, Italy held a referendum which resulted in the Italian monarchy being

abolished in favor of a republic.

In 1966, the U.S. space probe Surveyor 1 landed on the moon and began transmitting detailed photographs of the lunar surface.

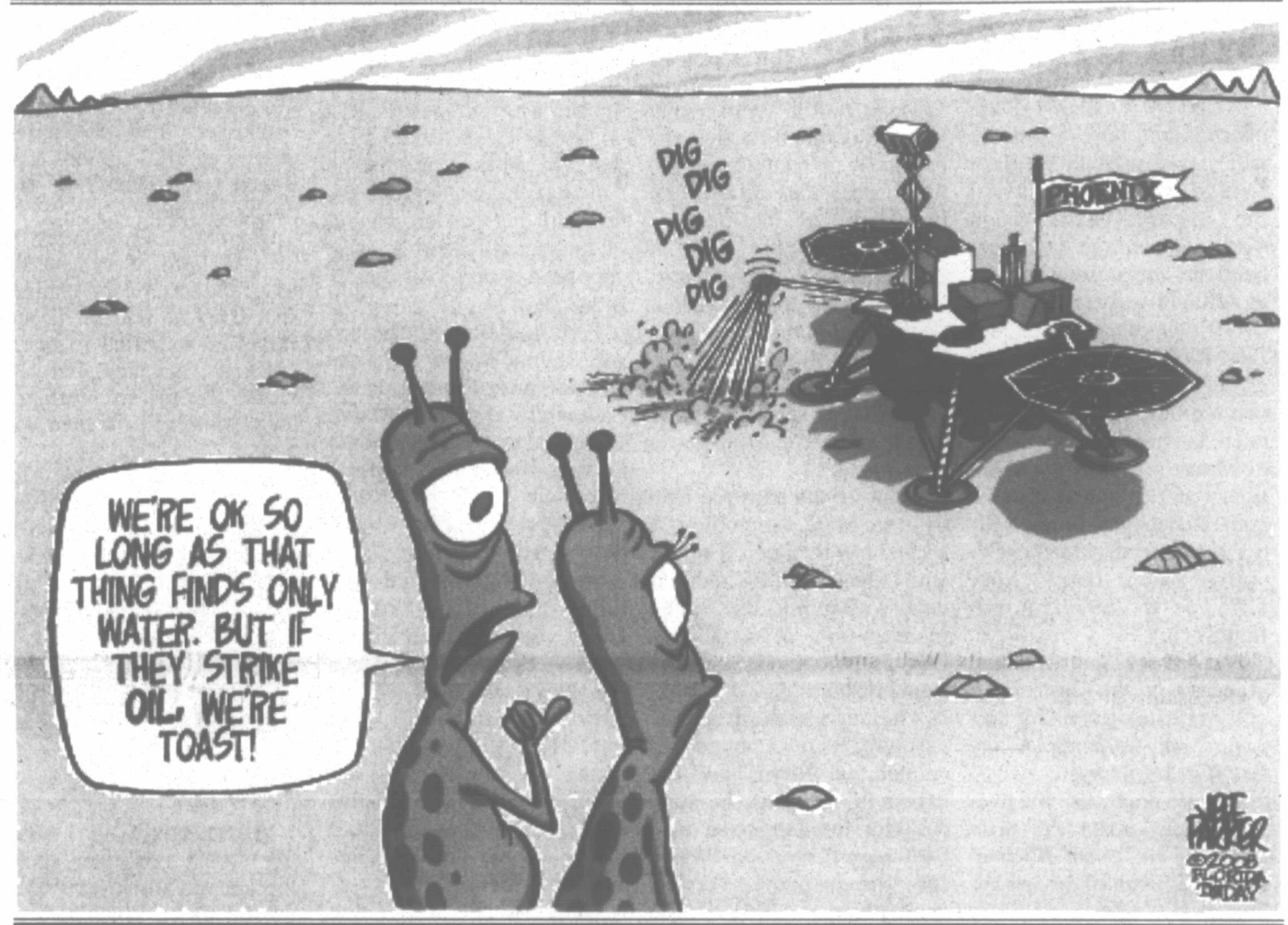
In 1975, Vice President Nelson Rockefeller said his commission had found no widespread pattern of illegal activities at the Central Intelligence Agency.

In 1979, Pope John Paul II arrived in his native Poland on the first visit by a pope to a Communist country.

In 1986, for the first time, the public could watch the proceedings of the U.S. Senate on television as a six-week experiment of televised sessions began.

Ten years ago: Voters in California passed Proposition 227, which effectively abolished the state's 30-year-old bilingual education program by requiring that all children be taught in English. Monica Lewinsky hired a new defense team, Jacob Stein and Plato Cacheris, replacing William H. Ginsburg as her lead attorney.

Five years ago: President Bush, visiting the Middle East, pledged to work unflinchingly for the goal of Israel and a Palestinian state living side by side without bloodshed. The Federal Communications Commission eased limits on media ownership.



Kennedy: Reporting the good with the bad

Sen. Ted Kennedy, D-Mass., has been diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor that is likely to be fatal in a relatively short time. Everybody's luck runs out sooner or later. At 76, he's had a pretty good run marked by both family tragedies and political successes.

The usual Washington crowd is falling all over itself in heaping praise on Kennedy, some even claiming he's been one of the greatest senators ever. Whether he was a great senator or merely a long-serving senator depends on your opinion of the legislation he helped pass. He was certainly one of the legislative contractors who built the American welfare state.

If you're going to put the man's life in perspective, however, you should Google "Chappaquiddick," especial-

ly if you're too young to know what that was about. That's the site of a most disgraceful episode in Kennedy's life.

He drove off a bridge. There was a girl in the car. He got out. She didn't, and she died. He claimed he tried to save her, but we have only his word for that.

He went back to the site of a party and conferred with two aides. The aides claimed they tried to find her, too. All night, Kennedy conferred with family lawyers and public-relations people. Some nine hours later, two fishermen spotted the car and reported the accident. In the meantime, Kennedy had gone back to his hotel, cleaned up and didn't men-

tion the accident to anyone the next morning until he was confronted by the police chief.

Some people believe that if he had reported the accident immediately, she might have been saved. The theory is that there was probably a bubble of air in the car. But we will never know. The Kennedy machine covered it all up. You can read the sordid details if you're interested. The girl's name was Mary Jo Kopechne, a former campaign worker for Bobby Kennedy.

Kennedy for many years was a rounder and a womanizer. Old age and a stiff back might have reformed him. He also had a reputation, at

least in his youth, for being the least bright of the Kennedy brothers. At least he has been smart enough to have always hired a bright staff.

I feel nothing for the man, one way or the other. He is, to me, a mop of white hair set upon a majestic head with a booming voice. I've seen a lot of white hair and heard a lot of loud voices. It annoys me, though, when the national news media undertake to whitewash a public figure. The current Washington crowd is made up of the biggest suck-ups on the planet. They labor mightily, in the words of Thomas Wolfe, "to make the world safe for hypocrisy." If you are going to write about Ted Kennedy, people are entitled to know it all, the good and the bad. Trying to

See REESE, Page 5

Charley Reese
Columnist



Texas Thoughts

By The Associated Press

A sample of editorial opinion around Texas:

■ May 26
Fort Worth Star-Telegram on the plight of the children at the Yearning for Zion ranch in West Texas:

No one disputes that removing more than 450 children from their parents in the Yearning For Zion ranch outside Eldorado had to be disruptive — even traumatizing — to those youngsters.

The question is whether the children's interests were better served by placing them in foster care than by leaving them with a sect in which girls are made to marry and have children while still children themselves.

It's hard for child welfare officials to

win. They're accused of overreacting because they removed all the children from the Fundamental Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints compound. Had they not acted, they might be accused of not protecting children from sexual abuse.

On Thursday, a three-judge appellate panel in Austin ruled that officials acted hastily, that they hadn't proved that a large number of younger children were in immediate danger and that a trial judge should have returned almost 130 children to their families after custody hearings in April.

But on Friday, the state appealed to the Texas Supreme Court, saying the appellate panel wrongly second-guessed the trial judge and would force the Texas Department of Family and

Protective Services to return children to an atmosphere of "continuing sexual and emotional abuse."

Ruling on a petition filed by about three dozen mothers, the court said that state District Judge Barbara Walther erred in not overruling the decision to remove the children from their families on an emergency basis. The court's reasoning: Though the state identified 20 women at the ranch who became pregnant while they were between 13 and 17 years old, all but five now are adults, none lived with the women petitioning the court, and there wasn't evidence younger children had been physically or sexually abused.

The appeals court rejected the state's

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Dear Abby...

By Pauline & Jeanne Phillips

DEAR ABBY: I am a 54-year-old divorced father of one daughter. I'm fit, look good for my age and earn a good income as a consultant. I'm not rich, but I own a condo and have a sizable retirement fund. I have a strong desire to remarry, but I have some "baggage." My daughter, "Danielle," is bipolar. She has done nothing since graduating from high school last year but get into trouble. Danielle has been arrested for drugs and stealing, and hangs out with a rough crowd. My ex-wife does not have the inner strength to throw her out, which would probably be the best thing for her. This is out of my control, but still, women I date lose interest in me when they learn about my daughter. I hate to lie, but I think I may have to start when we trade information about our children. They are often very accomplished, so the contrast is terrible. Should I make up some half-truths until the time is right to tell the whole story? I'll follow your recommendation. -- **EMBARRASSED IN VIRGINIA**

DEAR EMBARRASSED: Your daughter suffers from a mental illness. She belongs in treatment, not on the streets. That your ex-wife hasn't thrown her out isn't a reflection of weakness, but a measure of her strength of character. You and your ex could both benefit from joining a support group -- and I have one for you. It's the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance. Since it was founded in 1986, it has grown to more than 1,000 support groups nationwide, and offers advice and online information for persons with depressive and manic-depressive illness and their families. To find a chapter near you, call toll-free (800) 826-3632 or visit its Web site: www.dbsalliance.org.

Under no circumstances should you concoct any "half-truths" in an attempt to cover up your situation. A woman who would write you off because you have a sick child doesn't sound like much of a catch. And any woman with a head on her shoulders would resent having been misled. I don't know where you're finding the women you've been seeing, but I recommend you fish in other dating pools. In a support group you might meet someone with whom you have much in common.

DEAR ABBY: I live in Chicago and commute to and from work each day on the El train, which is typically crowded. There are never enough seats to go around. What surprises me is the lack of thoughtfulness that men show when it comes to seating. It's extremely rare for a man to offer a seat to a lady. In fact, I have watched men race past women to grab seats. Just the other day, there was a very pregnant woman on the train and not a single person offered her a seat. I'm not trying to portray females as the needy, weaker sex, but some chivalry would be nice. In this age of equal rights, am I outdated in my thinking? -- **NEEDS A SEAT IN CHICAGO**

DEAR NEEDS A SEAT: I don't think so, but there are those who would argue with us. With more people using public transportation because of increased fuel prices, seats are at a premium. One would hope that the commuters would practice good manners, but if a man didn't offer a pregnant woman his seat during the commute, I would offer her mine rather than force her to stand on swollen feet and ankles.

For Better Or Worse



Zits



Garfield



Beetle Bailey



Marvin



Crossword Puzzle

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Wasn't thrifty
 - 6 Gator's cousin
 - 10 Archer's ammo
 - 11 Pay tribute to
 - 13 Strong suit
 - 14 Ease up
 - 15 Genesis name
 - 16 Shade tree
 - 18 Oahu garland
 - 19 Food fishes
 - 22 Table part
 - 23 Pennsylvania
 - 24 Captain's superior
 - 27 Showy flower
 - 28 Earth-bound birds
 - 29 Circle section
 - 30 Misleading clues
 - 35 Anger
 - 36 Maiden name
 - 37 Have a bite
 - 38 Like some floors
 - 40 Disgrace
 - 42 Frighten
- DOWN**
- 1 Morley of CBS
 - 2 Bear out
 - 3 Goofed
 - 4 Negating word
 - 5 Player able to play two positions
 - 6 Victor
 - 7 Hold up star
 - 8 Ready for action
 - 9 Clique
 - 12 Paul of "Mad About You"
 - 17 Drop back
 - 20 Spill over
 - 21 "My Cousin Vinny"
 - 24 Deserves
 - 25 Uncle Sam's home
 - 26 "Gattaca" actor
 - 27 Collars
 - 29 "Right you —!"
 - 31 Concluded
 - 32 "Keen!"
 - 33 Casino patron
 - 34 Exacting
 - 39 Before, to bards
 - 41 Heron —

J	O	T	S	W	E	L	D			
R	U	P	E	E	A	R	I	E		
I	N	E	R	T	I	R	E	N		
G	I	N	M	I	L	L	D	I	E	
H	O	T	N	O	S	W	E	A	T	
T	R	O	U	T	S	A	R	L	O	
H	O	T	E	L						
T	R	I	O	O	C	L	O	C	K	
W	I	S	H	F	U	L	N	A	N	
I	D	O	A	T	I	S	S	U	E	
T	I	B	E	T	P	H	A	S	E	
S	N	A	R	E	S	S	O	L	E	S
G	R	A	D	E	W	E	S			

Saturday's answer

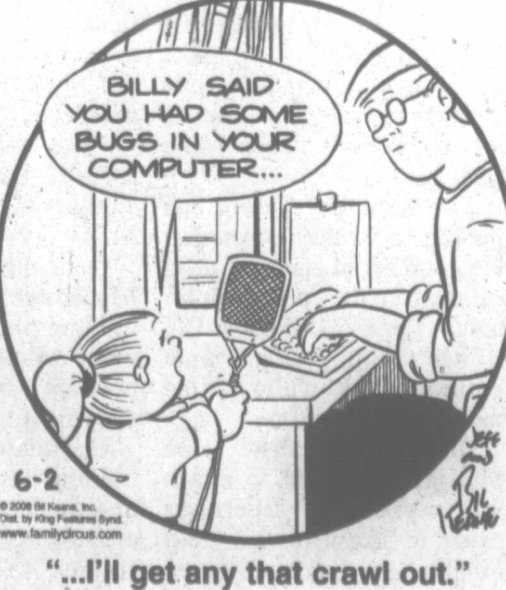
- 17 Drop
- 20 Spill over
- 21 "My Cousin Vinny"
- 24 Deserves
- 25 Uncle Sam's home
- 26 "Gattaca" actor
- 27 Collars
- 29 "Right you —!"
- 31 Concluded
- 32 "Keen!"
- 33 Casino patron
- 34 Exacting
- 39 Before, to bards
- 41 Heron —

Marmaduke

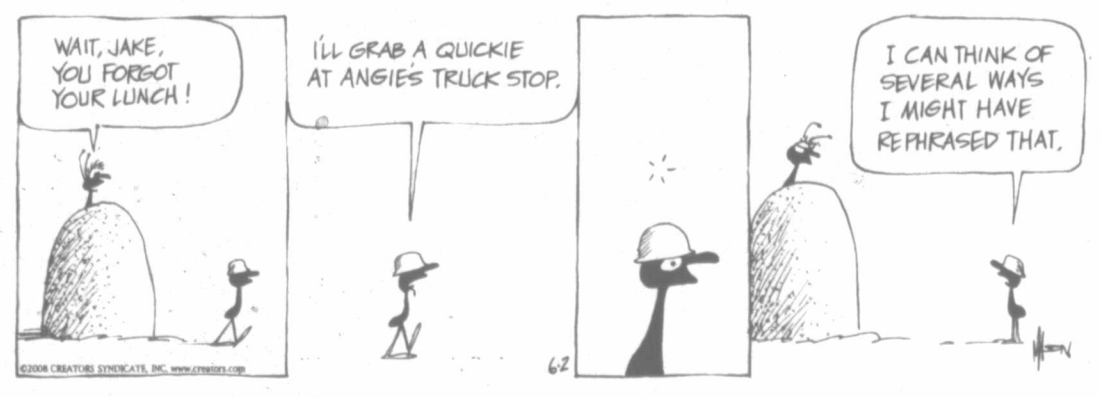


The Family Circus

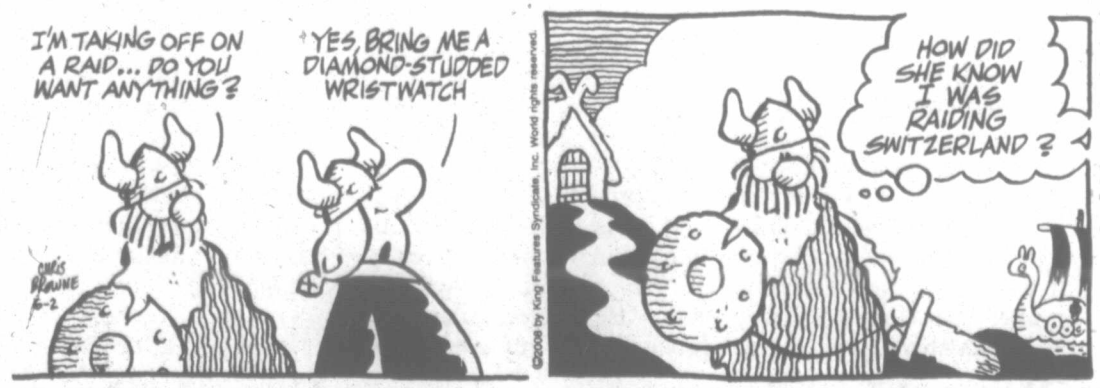
By Bil Keane



B.C.



Hagar The Horrible



Peanuts



Blondie



Flo & Friends



CREATE-A-Beat!



Courtesy Photos

CREATE-a-Beat! recently celebrated the end of the school year with an end-of-year party. TOP: Ethan Bailey kept his eyes closed to keep the water out during the festivities. MIDDLE: Carter Sprinkle used the CREATE-a-Beat! waterslide to practice "sliding into second base." BOTTOM: D'Anthony Ontiveros got a little sideways on the water slide.

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Obesity epidemic peaked?

CHICAGO (AP) — The percentage of American children who are overweight or obese appears to have leveled off after a 25-year increase, according to new figures that offer a glimmer of hope in an otherwise dismal battle.

"That is a first encouraging finding in what has been unremittingly bad news," said Dr. David Ludwig, director of an obesity clinic at Children's Hospital Boston. "But it's too soon to know if this really means we're beginning to make meaningful inroads into this epidemic. It may simply be a statistical fluke."

In 2003-04 and 2005-06, roughly 32 percent of children were overweight or obese, and 16 percent were obese, according to a study by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Those levels held steady after rising without interruption since 1980.

"Maybe there is some reason for a little bit of optimism," said CDC researcher Cynthia Ogden, the study's lead author.

Some experts said that if the leveling-off is real, it could be because more schools and parents are emphasizing better eating habits and more exercise. Even so, they and Ogden stressed that it would be premature to celebrate.

"Without a substantial decline in prevalence, the full impact of the childhood epidemic will continue to mount in coming years," Ludwig said. That is because it can take many years for obesity-related complications to translate into life-threatening events, including heart attacks and kidney failure.

He co-wrote an editorial accompanying the study in Wednesday's Journal of the American Medical Association. He had no role in the research.

The results are based on 8,165 children ages 2 to 19 who participated in nationally representative government health surveys in 2003-04 and 2005-06.

The surveys are considered the most accurate reflection of obesity levels because they are based on in-person measurements, not on people's own

reporting of their height and weight.

CDC data reported last year showed obesity rates for men also held steady from 2003-04 to 2005-06 at about 33 percent after two decades of increases. The rate for women, 35 percent, remained at a plateau reached in 2003-04.

The CDC's analysis of data for 2007-08, due next year, may be the best evidence for determining what direction chil-

dren's rates are really heading, Ludwig said.

Dr. Reginald Washington, a children's heart specialist in Denver and member of an American Academy of Pediatrics obesity committee, said "the country should be congratulated" if the rates have in fact peaked.

"There are a lot of people trying to do good things to try to stem the tide," Washington said.



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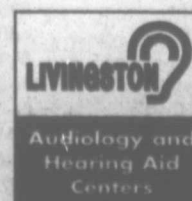
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