

FREE

Santa Monica Daily Press

A newspaper with issues

HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM THE STAFF AT THE SANTA MONICA DAILY PRESS!

NEWS OF THE WEIRD
by Chuck Shepard

In October, the Minneapolis Star Tribune reported on the heated clash in the Twin Cities suburb of Eden Prairie over how much money to spend on a new historic preservation program, which the Star Tribune noted was ironic because the town was nothing more than farms until the 1950s. Said a City Council member, "I think an argument can be made that the word 'historic' is being loosely used." And an August Boston Globe story deglamorized Plymouth Rock, supposedly where the first pilgrims stepped in 1620 as they disembarked near what is now Plymouth, Mass. It's just a large rock, kept in an open pen (and was named by TV's Learning Channel as one of America's 10 lamest landmarks).

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"I'm not a real movie star — I've still got the same wife I started out with twenty-eight years ago."
— Will Rogers

INDEX

Horoscopes

Pitch in, Libra2

Local

A military tribute3

Opinion

Plastic or cloth?4

State

Wine industry hurt5

National

The ice man cometh11

Back Page

Ghost village under the scope ...16



John Wood/Daily Press
Samohi students prepare to deliver more than 150 gifts to needy children at local elementary schools throughout Santa Monica.

A very charitable trend at Samohi delivers the goods

Students buy, deliver presents to needy kids

BY JOHN WOOD
Daily Press Staff Writer

SAMOHI — More than 150 needy youngsters will open an extra gift this holiday season thanks to the hard work of a group of students at Santa Monica High School.

The gifts range from dolls and miniature cars to electric keyboards, scooters and art kits. They were given this month to students on free-lunch programs at area elementary schools.

"We want to give inspiration to these kids that don't have anything," said Erendira Gracida, 17, a senior at Samohi. "It's just very empowering ..."

Here's how the plan worked: Armed with a list of needy stu-

"We want to give inspiration to these kids that don't have anything."

— **ERENDIRA GRACIDA**
Samohi senior

dents, Gracida and a small band of students went to each home-room at Samohi and asked them to raise money to buy a gift, priced between \$20 and \$30. The gifts were then collected by the group, wrapped and taken to six local schools. When they arrived at the schools, the gifts already

See SAMOHI, page 5

Counselors help debtors beat the burden

BY ED STOVER
Associated Press Writer

YAKIMA, Wash. — The box of Kleenex strategically located on the front corner of Merry Ames' desk doesn't care if you're rich or poor — those who pluck a tissue to dab their eyes share a common woe.

They're in serious debt. "We get lots of tears," said Ames, director of counseling and community services at Consumer Credit Counseling Service of the Yakima Valley, the Yakima-based nonprofit

that aids those with a propensity to spend more than they have.

"And it's truly Everyperson," added CCCS Executive Director Geoff Baker, describing the more than 1,000 clients served by CCCS, which, with satellite offices in Wenatchee and Moses Lake, covers central Washington from the Canadian border south to the Columbia River.

CCCS is one of four such agencies in the state affiliated with the National Foundation for Credit Counseling, which has more than 1,000 community-based offices throughout the United States.

"It's a human problem, and if you truly love human beings you can't help but get emotionally involved," said Baker, explaining that his staff of 11 really empathize with those who pass through their doors.

Soon, in the wake of Christmas, the biggest spending season of the year, those doors will open more often. It happens every year.

"January and February are times when people are getting into trouble," said Baker.

"There's usually a gap after the holidays,"

See COUNSELORS, page 8

Botched errand becomes \$20 million business

MARIANNE COSTANTINO
Associated Press Writer

SAN FRANCISCO — Some careers stem from a lifelong dream. But one began as 550 pounds of raw chocolate stashed in a garage.

To keep his girlfriend from discovering that a simple errand

to get some chocolate for her fledgling pastry business had somehow turned into a truckload, Joseph Schmidt decided to melt the evidence and turn it into candy when she wasn't looking — even though he didn't know anything about chocolate candies.

As his luck would have it, the chocolates became a culinary suc-

cess. His girlfriend forgave him, gave up her petits fours, and joined him in starting a new American confection company soon made famous by its signature egg-shaped, hard-shell chocolates with creamy-flavored centers. The candy is known in the industry as "The American Truffle," and it's Schmidt's creation.

And that, in a truffle shell, is how a botched errand became a \$20 million business.

This year, the private company in San Francisco will sell about 20 million truffles at major department stores and gourmet food shops across the country, as

See ERRAND, page 8

Holidays! Music! Fun!
Lessons • Instruments
(310) 453-1928
1901 SANTA MONICA BLVD.
IN SANTA MONICA

SANTA MONICA MUSIC CENTER
www.santamonicamusic.com

McGee, Lerer & Associates
PERSONAL INJURY
WILLS, TRUSTS & PROBATE
BUSINESS LITIGATION
(310) 231-9717
Free consultations

IZZY'S DELI
Features THE UNDER \$10 DINNER SPECIAL
Served from 4pm - 10pm
1433 Wilshire Blvd at 15th St
310-394-1131

LOCAL



CALIFORNIA BRIEFS

Earthquake takes toll on wine industry

The Associated Press

PASO ROBLES — The earthquake that rumbled through California’s central coast struck hard at the region’s burgeoning wine industry, toppling barrels, spilling cases and leaving some wineries awash in rivers of merlot and cabernet.

The area roughly midway between Los Angeles and San Francisco has become one of California’s most productive wine-producing regions, with more than 80 wineries ringing Paso Robles, the small town hit hardest in Monday’s magnitude-6.5 earthquake.

The quake created a mess for dozens of those wineries, with owners left to mop up their tasting rooms and cellars.

Many said it would take them years to recover, particularly because the quake struck when most of this year’s vintage was stored in unstable barrels, instead of in mounted fermentation tanks or bottles.

At the Dover Canyon winery, 100 wooden barrels stacked in a pyramid collapsed in a heap, breaking open a half-dozen casks and crushing dozens of cases of bottled wine, some of premium vintage.

“We walked in here and it was ankle-deep, with wine flowing out the door into the rocks and garden area,” said co-owner Mary Baker. “It was pretty distressing. We can absorb a certain amount of loss, but it’s going to be hard because we’re a boutique winery on a boutique budget.”

SEC cracks down on \$813M scandal

The Associated Press

SACRAMENTO — The federal Securities and Exchange Commission on Tuesday froze the accounts of an unlicensed Southern California firm it says held more than \$813 million for more than 5,200 investors as part of “a fraudulent scheme.”

The SEC alleges that the owner of Financial Advisory Consultants, James Paul Lewis Jr., withdrew \$3 million from the Orange County firm’s accounts even as he was telling his clients across the nation that they couldn’t have their money.

A federal judge on Tuesday granted the SEC’s request for a temporary restraining order against Lewis, 57, of Laguna Niguel, freezing his assets and those of his company and its two investment funds.

The SEC filed its complaint against Lewis in federal court Monday, the same day the FBI raided the El Toro firm and removed most of its documents and computer equipment.

No criminal charges have been filed, but the FBI says in a search warrant affidavit that it has probable cause to believe Lewis was operating a Ponzi scheme in which early investors were paid with money contributed by later investors.

MEChA delivers more than 150 holiday gifts

SAMOHI, from page 1

had the individual students’ names written on them. School workers then distributed the gifts after school was let out.

Participating elementary schools included John Muir, Edison, McKinley, Will Rogers, Grant and Franklin. This year’s effort was overseen by Samohi math teacher and alumnus Alicia Gonzalez, who participated in the program herself before graduating in 1992.

Gonzalez is one of the faculty advisors that oversees MEChA, a group of 28 Latino students who organized the gift-giving campaign. MEChA stands for “Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanos de Aztlan,” or, roughly, the movement of Chicano students for Aztlan. Aztlan is a

mythical place in the American Southwest that dates back to the Aztec era, Gonzalez said.

MEChA is an organization aimed at empowering Latino students, and promoting higher education and community service. Gracida, the president, said she is waiting to hear back from colleges she applied to earlier this year. Her first choice is Penn State University.

In the meantime, Gonzalez, the advisor, said the gift-giving effort has benefited everyone involved.

“It’s a lot of work, but it’s really fun,” she said, adding the younger students usually send back thank you cards after the holidays. “It’s a reminder — I’m an idealist, so I always believe in the inherent goodness of people.”



M & A TOBACCO & GIFTS

<p>Nat Sherman MCD 3-pack for \$11.08 + tax <small>w/ COUPON Exp. 12/31/03</small></p>	<p>Nat Sherman NY cut 3-pack for \$9.85 + tax <small>w/ COUPON Exp. 12/31/03</small></p>	<p>\$2 OFF <small>ON ALL INTERNATIONAL CIGARETTES</small> CARTONS ONLY <small>w/ COUPON Exp. 12/31/03</small></p>
<p>1434 Fourth St. Santa Monica (parking in rear) 310.393.9592</p>	<p>Copenhagen / Skoal Kodiak 2 for \$9.24 + tax <small>w/ COUPON Exp. 12/31/03</small></p>	<p>WE CARRY ALL KINDS OF TOBACCO POUCHES & CAN</p> <p><small>See our ad every Saturday & Tuesday We beat all prices in town because we are in Santa Monica!</small></p>



Come In & Experience Our Grilled or Cold Panini Sandwiches & Superb Salads

A BREAKTHROUGH IN THE WORLD OF SANDWICHES

Panini Party Platters • Weekly Specials • Everything Fresh & Made to Order
Order Online at: www.paninigarden.com • Dine-In Garden Patio • We Deliver

Open Daily from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.

2715 Main Street • Santa Monica • (310) 399-9939 • Fax (310) 314-2634



“We’re gonna make you happy.”

INFINITI
of Santa Monica



FX 35/45



M45

Look for our pre-owns daily in the classifieds.

900 SANTA MONICA BLVD.
IN SANTA MONICA • (310) 394-1888

Looking for a Last-Minute Gift?
How about our

Winter Day Spa Package
Haircut
(Consultation, shampoo, conditioning, cut & blow-dry)
Manicure/Pedicure
(A full-service luxurious treatment)
Massage
(A full hour of Relaxation Therapy)

Great Stocking Stuffer
a \$165 value for only

\$99

offer ends Feb. 29th

or purchase an Off The Top Gift Card in any denomination you choose.

1418 Main St., Santa Monica (310) 452-8985