

Santa Monica Daily Press

A newspaper with issues

LOTTO

FANTASY 5

20, 25, 15, 18, 32

DAILY 3

Afternoon picks: 9, 8, 9

Evening picks: 9, 2, 9

DAILY DERBY

1st Place: 3, Hot Shot

2nd Place: 1, Gold Rush

3rd Place: 7, Eureka

Race Time: 1:45.80



NEWS OF THE WEIRD

by Chuck Shepard

George Duncan was finally fired by the New York Department of Corrections in November, after having taken 744 "sick" days in 15 years (for spikes of high blood pressure), none of which were ever authenticated by doctors examining Duncan afterward. And a week before that, the city of Vicksburg, Miss., took a step to alleviate its own problem with employees' illnesses: Henceforth, city workers will be expected to give 48 hours' notice before taking sick days.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Literature is mostly about having sex and not much about having children. Life is the other way around."

— David Lodge

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School supporters give City Hall ultimatum

Proposed charter amendment seeks \$6 million annually for school district

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON
Daily Press Staff Writer

CITY HALL — A group of school supporters forced City Hall's hand Tuesday by pushing for a measure on the fall ballot that, if passed, would mandate \$6 million in public money be given to the school district every year.

Representatives from the "Community for Excellent Public Schools" filed a proposal to amend the Santa Monica charter with City Clerk Maria Stewart. The amendment would require a portion of City Hall's general fund be funneled directly into the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District indefinitely. The grassroots community organization, also known as CEPS, will have to get 15 percent of Santa Monica voters — about 8,250 people — to sign a petition by May to get the measure on the November ballot.

But school supporters hope it doesn't come to that. The amendment proposal serves as a warning to City Council members: Either establish a permanent funding source for the school

district, or let voters decide how City Hall's money should be spent. "We will swing into aggressive signature mode," said Rebecca Kennerly, a CEPS spokesperson. "We have until May ... [But] I don't think anyone is looking forward to an election or a campaign."

What school supporters call a nudge or warning, politicians consider a threat. "I think it is divisive," said City Councilman Herb Katz. "I don't think you pass a charter amendment where it



David Hume Kennerly/Special to the Daily Press
(Left to right) 'Community for Excellent Public Schools' co-chairs, Shari Davis and Louise Jaffe, along with CEPS steering committee member, Ralph Mechur, file a charter-amendment proposal with City Clerk Maria Stewart on Tuesday at City Hall. The proposed amendment would mandate that a portion of city funds be given to local schools every year.

can't be changed. I don't like that they are holding it over our heads and are forcing our hand."

Mayor Richard Bloom agrees. "I'm very concerned about any measure that restricts the economic flexibility of the city," he said. "The city of Santa Monica is being mandated that city revenue be spent outside of our jurisdiction, and that's troublesome to me."

The measure would require the city
See AMENDMENT, page 7



John Wood/Daily Press
Prosecutor Ann Rundle talks to the media outside of the LAX Courthouse on Tuesday.

Weller pleads "not guilty"

Lawyers say market crash was an accident, not a crime

BY JOHN WOOD
Daily Press Staff Writer

LAX COURTHOUSE — The Santa Monica man who drove through a crowded Farmers' Market last summer leaving 10 people dead and hurting another 63 pleaded not guilty on Tuesday to felony charges of manslaughter.

Russell Weller, 87, will remain free without bail until he is tried. He faces 10 counts of vehicular manslaughter with gross negligence and could spend as long as 18 years behind bars if convicted.

Lawyers said there is no doubt Weller caused the carnage in downtown Santa



John Wood/ Daily Press
Attorneys for Russell Weller speak to reporters during a press conference outside of the courthouse on Tuesday.

See WELLER, page 6

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LOCAL

Council would lose control of financial discretion with charter amendment

AMENDMENT, from page 1

to provide a minimum of \$6 million in annual revenues to the school district, or about 4 percent of designated general funds, whichever is greater. Also, funding to the district would be modestly increased each year — but only when the city's revenues grow by at least 3.5 percent.

Last year's contribution to the district from City Hall was \$5.25 million — its regular \$3 million annual contribution, plus \$2.25 million in one-time funds. City Hall also doled out one-time funds above and beyond its annual contribution in previous years, despite its own budget problems.

The SMMUSD faced a \$13 million budget shortfall last year but was able to close the gap through personnel cuts and new revenue sources, such as the parcel tax, which will bring in \$6.5 million annually over the next six years.

But with federal and state funding uncertain, school supporters are afraid more cuts will need to be made in the future and, more importantly, new programs will never see the light of day. And as costs continue to increase, more funding will be necessary, school supporters say.

"We believe this is a very good addition to the city's charter," says CEPS co-chair Louise Jaffe. "Over time it will increase school funding,

but just as importantly, it will provide stability and predictability for both the schools and the city government, without raising taxes or jeopardizing current city and social services."

And with a more than \$350 million annual budget, school supporters believe City Hall can afford to continue its financial commitment to the district.

"We live in a very prosperous city, and it has the resources," CEPS co-chair Shari Davis said. "This measure would represent a small portion of city funds while greatly benefiting our schools."

In recent weeks, Santa Monica City Council members have been looking for ways to provide ongoing stable funding to education. And school supporters hope the charter amendment will expedite what could be a long, drawn-out decision-making process.

"We applaud the council's efforts to support education," says Ralph Mechur, CEPS steering committee member. "We look forward to working with them to find a long-term solution and hope our charter amendment will be seen as a blueprint for a solution that can work for everyone."

It was suggested last month that City Hall, weary of a developing pattern of school supporters marching in front of the Council and asking for more cash every year, could purchase

or rent nearly two dozen district properties. Under the proposed plan, schools would earn millions of dollars while local officials would have an opportunity to build more underground parking, create open space and make other improvements that could benefit greater Santa Monica.

It's a better solution than forcing local government to earmark a portion of its annual revenues for schools, officials said.

And although Councilman Katz, who proposed the idea, wants to continue discussing funding options, Mayor Bloom said the council already is doing what it can.

"I don't think anything needs to be worked out," he said, adding he'll read the amendment and consider it carefully. "The City Council has taken the lead on education funding. We've done it in a responsible way, and I have every confidence that the council and future councils will continue to do that."

"It is fiscally inappropriate to allocate millions of additional funding without providing a new revenue source," he added.

Councilman Kevin McKeown, who hasn't read the amendment, also believes a new revenue source is the responsible way to fund local schools.

"There aren't any more pockets to be taken from," he said.

Advertising rights given to companies

SCHOOLS, from page 1

help, or mentions in school newspapers.

Similar deals are being made across the country at all levels of education as money-strapped schools increasingly turn to companies for financial support.

"First and foremost, our schools are struggling," the National School Boards Association's Dan Fuller said. "Many districts are engaged in this (commercialism) because of the dire straits they're in. This presents a real opportunity and a trend that will continue and possibly grow."

As a result, corporate advertisements are cropping up on everything from high school scoreboards to the sides of school buses. A Dr Pepper billboard is atop a Texas school, earning that school district millions of dollars.

And soft drinks are being sold under contract in many schools.

In Seattle, the school district — its budget so tight that nearly 200 staffers had to be cut — has renewed an exclusive deal with Coca-Cola Co. for vending machines in middle and high schools. The five-year contract,

worth more than \$1.5 million for the district, helps fund field trips, yearbooks, school newspapers and extracurricular activities.

Colleges and universities — and even New York City itself — have also been signing on with corporations.

The University of Vermont is getting \$4.3 million over 10 years from Coca-Cola in exchange for giving the company the right to provide all the soft drinks, bottled water, packaged juices and sports drinks sold in vending

machines and campus dining rooms.

Just a few months ago, the makers of Snapple won exclusive rights to sell their bottled water and fruit juices in vending machines on all city property in New York, including schools. Snapple will pay the city \$106 million and spend \$60 million more to market and promote the city over the five-year contract. The city's public school system is the nation's largest, with 1,200 schools and 1.1 million students.

Critics say such deals erode the schools' long-held

ability to insulate children from marketing and promote a climate where children are being asked to pay for education one soda at a time. And the sale of soft drinks in school, they argue, may add to the roughly 15 percent of children and teens that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention calls overweight.

"It's really a bargain with the devil because what these districts essentially are doing is selling their students' health," said Alex

See SCHOOLS, page 10

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