

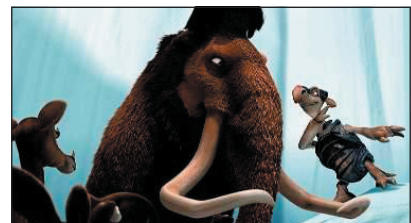
Racer dies

Driver Paul Dana dies after a two-car crash during IRL warm-ups.



Cool showing

"Ice Age: The Meltdown" highlights this week's new movies. **B1**



The Standard-Times

S E R V I N G T H E S O U T H C O A S T C O M M U N I T Y

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Huntoon defends time card criticism

By NANCY COOK
Standard-Times staff writer

ROCHESTER — By 2 p.m. on a recent Wednesday, Rochester Town Administrator James F. Huntoon had left for the day.

Two days later on a Friday, his swivel chair stood empty at 12:45 p.m.

Neat stacks of manila folders sat atop his desk. A monthly calendar, displaying a photograph of a rainbow over the word "Excellence" hung on a nearby wall.

"One of the things that has been brought to my attention on many occasions is that Jim nor-

Mr. Huntoon's contract does not stipulate the hours he must work — only that he must perform the "functions and duties" of his job.

mally works five to six hours a day, normally until 1 p.m.," said Selectman Bradford N. Morse.

Tax Collector Thomas Gayoski Jr., who works in Town Hall, believed Mr. Huntoon worked even fewer hours: "To the average person, he's never here or leaves early. But that's between him and the selectmen," he said. Several

other town employees refused to comment.

Mr. Huntoon's working hours, among other questions, have plagued and dragged out his contract negotiations, which should come to a close tonight during an executive session, according to the selectmen. Under his current one-year contract, he earns

roughly \$71,000 per year, along with five weeks vacation, 12 sick days and \$100 per month in travel expenses. Town administrators in Mattapoisett and Marion respectively earn \$76,500 and \$78,500 per year.

Mr. Huntoon's contract does not stipulate the hours he must work — only that he must perform the "functions and duties" of his job, a position he has held since 1998.

Mr. Huntoon argues that he works from home every afternoon on sensitive town issues such as

See HUNTOON A5

Gabrieli gathers growing support

Investor seeking votes for Democratic primary ballot

By JACK SPILLANE
Standard-Times staff

NEW BEDFORD — Millionaire investor Chris Gabrieli has quietly built a SouthCoast base over the past few months, and his local backers are now predicting that the Boston businessman will eventually have enough support to get on the Democratic primary ballot for governor.

Longtime Democratic state committeeman John Howcroft of Acushnet said a statewide movement on behalf of Mr. Gabrieli, 46, began to build around the time of the Democratic caucuses in February.

The goal is to have 500 of the roughly 5,300 delegates to the Democratic state convention sign a request to put Mr. Gabrieli's name before the convention as a gubernatorial candidate.

In order to be placed on the September Democratic primary ballot, Mr. Gabrieli needs to win the support of 15 percent of convention delegates. Mr. Gabrieli, however, did not announce his candidacy in time for last month's Democratic caucuses, so now he needs the signatures of 500 delegates to have his candidacy considered at the convention.

The list of local activists who have signed a request for Mr. Gabrieli to be considered reads like a who's who of local Democratic politicians. It includes all three Democratic state committeemen — Mr. Howcroft; former New Bedford Mayor Rosemary Tierney; and longtime labor activist Tina Ponte.

It also includes New Bedford state Rep. Stephen Canessa and New Bedford City Councilors Joe

See GABRIELI A5

As war rages, a salute

Veterans celebrated on Vietnam anniversary

By CURT BROWN
Standard-Times staff writer

NEW BEDFORD — Local Vietnam veterans yesterday remembered the 31st anniversary of the end of the war and honored those loyal and patriotic soldiers who served in the Southeast Asian war that divided the nation.

At ceremonies attended by about 50 people in the community building at Fort Taber, the Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 499 of New Bedford honored the more than 48,000 U.S. soldiers who died in Vietnam as well as the 43 soldiers from Greater New Bedford who died in service to their country.

The names of the 43 local soldiers were read aloud and a bell was struck for each.

U.S. soldiers who remain either missing or unaccounted from the war were also remembered.

Normand J. "Red" Perry Jr., president of the local Vietnam veterans chapter, said he and his wife, Donna, are moving to Florida later this year and he will be leaving the organization.

The 57-year-old Vietnam veteran said they're building a house in Florida and want to live in a warmer climate after spending all their lives in New Bedford.

"I'll probably get a part-time job and ride my Harley-Davidson," he said.

Ward 6 Councilor Leo Pimental and Joseph Theodore, a veteran who started the flying of veterans' flags atop Old Glory Tower along Interstate 195, were honored for their contributions to veterans.

"He's an amazing person who always thinks of the veterans," Mr. Perry said of Mr. Pimental.

The councilor was admittedly "touched" by the award. "I'm honored. I'm really lost for words."

He mentioned the special meaning the award has and how important veterans of the Vietnam

See VETERANS A5



Photos by DAVID W. OLIVEIRA/Standard-Times special

Above: Joseph Theodore Jr., a veteran who started the flying of veterans' flags atop Old Glory Tower along Interstate 195, was honored yesterday by the Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 499 for his actions for area veterans.

Left: Veterans salute during the playing of the "Star Spangled Banner."



KARIM KADIM/The Associated Press

An Iraqi woman walks past as Iraqis clean the debris of their house, following a bomb explosion in Baghdad yesterday.

INSIDE TODAY

WEATHER Sunny and mild; high 54, low 25, **B6**.

LOTTERY Daily Number: **0940**; more lottery, **A2**.

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Businesses prepare for health bill

Per-worker assessment was lawmaker compromise

By AARON NICODEMUS
Standard-Times staff writer

Bob Viera Roofing and Siding, a small contracting company in Fairhaven, employs between eight and 12 workers, depending on the season. The company pays a fair wage and, starting last year, offers a 401(k) retirement plan.

But providing health care for his workers is too expensive, Mr. Viera said.

"I've tried four or five different times to provide insurance for them," he said. "I tried to offer them something that they could afford, if they paid so much a week. I could never make it work."

Providing health care for his workers would cost him thou-

sands of dollars a year, and it would cause him to be non-competitive.

"I'm competing against Home Depot and five other contractors for each job," he said. "You get small companies like us, there's no way we can afford it."

If a new health insurance law passes the Massachusetts Legislature as expected this week, Mr. Viera's company will join an estimated 5,400 small businesses that will have to pay \$295 per year, per uninsured employee into the state's free-care pool for the uninsured.

Mr. Viera thinks that the proposal is a good idea, and

See HEALTH A5

Competing bills slow action on plan

By DAVID KIBBE
Standard-Times staff writer

BOSTON — For months, top members of the state Legislature have wrangled behind closed doors on a complex, first-in-the-nation proposal to extend health care coverage to all 500,000 Massachusetts residents who currently lack insurance.

In the meantime, a number of other initiatives that seemed close to getting resolved at the beginning of the year have simply languished under the weight of the health care debate.

Rep. John F. Quinn, a Dartmouth Democrat who sits on the House Ways and Means Committee, said one of the big reasons was cost. No one knows how much the Legislature will have to spend on an economic stimulus package and a mid-year spending bill until health care is done.

See BILLS A5

U.S., Iraqi forces strike al-Sadr group

By JONATHAN FINER and JOHN WARD ANDERSON
The Washington Post

BAGHDAD, Iraq — U.S. and Iraqi special forces killed at least 16 followers of fiery Shiite Muslim cleric Muqtada al-Sadr in a twilight assault yesterday on what the military said was a "terrorist cell" responsible for attacks on soldiers and civilians.

No U.S. or Iraqi personnel were killed in the clash, which occurred in the predominantly Sunni Muslim neighborhood of Adhamiya in northern Baghdad, according to a U.S. military statement late yesterday. One Iraqi soldier was wounded and 15 people were detained. An unidentified hostage was found at the site, the statement said, along with materials used to fashion homemade bombs.

Aides to al-Sadr, who is backed by one of the country's largest and most feared militias, said those killed were innocents praying in the Mustaffa mosque in the Shaab neighborhood, well north of Adhamiya when the assault began at 6 p.m. But the U.S. military said in a statement that "no mosques were entered or damaged during this operation." It was impossible to verify precisely where the raid took place because of

See IRAQ A3

