METRO BRIEFS

NEWS FROM AROUND THE REGION

Judge promises life to multiple offender

A man involved in two brutal crimes was convicted Wednesday morning by a judge who promised him at least life in prison. Carlo DeSalvo, 32, of Harvey was found guilty by Judge Charles "Chuck" Cusimano of armed robbery and two counts each of aggravated battery and second-degree kidnapping, in a scheme in which DeSalvo and another man attacked victims who were lured out of bars by a woman friend of theirs. Cusimano told DeSalvo that he had succeeded in "messing up your life" and that "you're going to jail for at least the rest of your life." As a multiple violent offender, DeSalvo could be sentenced to life plus extra years in prison. DeSalvo's male co-defendant, Robert Guccione, 30, was sentenced last year by Judge Ronald Loumiet to 100 years in prison. The woman who lured the men out of bars, Lila "Cheyenne" Plaisance, 28, Guccione's girlfriend, pleaded guilty and was sentenced to nine years in prison. Cusimano will sentence DeSalvo on Aug. 13.

EAST JEFFERSON

Property tax rebate proposed

Harahan Alderman Paul Johnston said he will make some changes in a proposed property tax rebate expected to be approved tonight to avoid a veto by Mayor Vinny Mosca. If approved at the Board of Aldermen's 7:30 p.m meeting, residents 62 years and older would receive rebates based on the taxpayer's homestead exemption. The rebate would cost the city about $45,000 in tax revenue, and residents who qualify would save about $46 a year on homes valued at $50,000. Mosca objects to the idea of the rebates, saying the city needs the money. He said he would veto the ordinance if it is too expensive for the city to administer, creates a fund for senior services to be administered by the Board of Aldermen or is illegal under the state's homestead exemption law Johnston, who proposed the ordinance because he said too many senior citizens in Harahan are being squeezed by rising taxes and fees levied by the city, said he was still working on revising the rebate Wednesday.

WEST BANK

Closed fireworks stands criticized

Colorful, busy fireworks stands welcome business to Gretna around New Year's and the Fourth of July, but city officials are trying to decide what to do with the sometimes unsightly stands during the long off-seasons. Mayor Ronnie Harris proposed this week that the city require the stands to be hidden behind fences during the 10 months when the stands are not being used Harris gave a slide presentation for the aldermen Monday night, showing some of the more unattractive stands around Gretna The law says the stands must be moved after they are closed for the season, but it doesn't specify where they must be moved to. Aldermen agreed that something needs to be done, but they suggested that city officials first meet with fireworks stand owners to come up with a solution fair to everybody.

RIVER PARISHES

Voters to decide on gas system sale

St. John the Baptist Parish voters will decide in a special election Saturday whether the parish should sell its citizen-owned natural gas system to Louisiana Gas Service for $2.1 million. Polls will be open from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. Despite a virtually nonexistant publicity campaign, parish officials are hoping voters will approve the sale of the system, which serves 2,250 customers in Garyville, Mount Airy and the LaPlace subdivisions of Carrollwood and Riverlands. Proponents say that by unloading the system, local government will be able to pay off some of its bond debts early, saving taxpayers about $200,000 a year in interest payments. On the other hand, it's unlikely rates will drop significantly for customers after the sale to a larger provider

ST. TAMMANY

Victims of phony mechanic sought

Slidell police are looking for victims of a phony mechanic who tricked motorists by dismantling their cars, then offering to repair them for a fee. Guy Joseph St. Amant, 37, was arrested Sunday in a parking lot on the Interstate 10 service road and booked with five counts of theft and damage to property with intent to defraud. His last known address is a Slidell motel, said Lt. Butch Jacobs, spokesman for the Slidell Police Department. Authorities said St. Amant would disable a car in a parking lot and wait for the owner to return. When the vehicle wouldn't start, he would pose as a mechanic and offer to help, charging victims $200 or more. A victim of the scam spotted St. Amant in the parking lot and called police St Amant is being held in the St. Tammany Parish jail in Covington, with bond set at $30,000.

Man shot in N.O. worked in Miss.

By BOB USSERY
Staff writer

A man who was found shot to death Tuesday in a desolate area near the Peoples Avenue Canal in the 9th Ward was identified Wednesday by the Orleans Parish coroner's office.

Toi Van Nguyen, 36, of eastern New Orleans, died of a gunshot wound to the chest, chief coroner's investigator John Gagliano said.

Nguyen appeared to have been dead for several hours when an anonymous call led police to him about 10 a.m. in the grass at Peoples and Lavender Street.

Nguyen's girlfriend said he worked as a parking valet at Casino Magic in Bay St. Louis, Miss. The girlfriend, who didn't give her name, said she phoned Nguyen at work Tuesday about 12:30 a.m. and he told her he was going home after getting off work about 2 a.m.

But she said police later told her Nguyen had gone to a Bay St. Louis bar after work early Tuesday.

She said Nguyen had an expensive car stereo, which he frequently showed off to friends. She thinks someone could have killed him for the stereo. His car has not been found, she said.

The coroner's office also released the identity of an Orleans Parish Prison inmate who was slain two months ago.

Michael Odom's name was released Wednesday after efforts to notify his relatives failed, Gagliano said. The hometown for Odom, 40, is unknown, Gagliano said.

A fellow inmate, Ronald Duncan, 37, has been indicted on a charge of second-degree murder.

Odom, who was serving a 30-day sentence for blocking a sidewalk, was beaten and suffocated in the medical section of the House of Detention, 2735 Perdido St., the Criminal Sheriff's Office said.

The attack occurred May 17 or 18, the district attorney's Office said.

Odom suffered a fractured neck, but the suffocation, possibly with a pillow, was what killed him, coroner Frank Minyard said.

Two unrelated deaths were classified as suicides Wednesday by Minyard.

In one case, the decomposed body of a 26-year-old woman was found Tuesday morning in her bedroom in the 1200 block of Decatur Street. She died of a gunshot wound to her head, Gagliano said.

In the other case, a woman was found dead Saturday in the 100 block of Iberville Street after she apparently jumped from a parking garage. The names of the women are being withheld while relatives are notified.

DEADLY WRECK



A New Orleans woman was killed and a Metairie couple injured in an accident on Earhart Boulevard and Mistletoe Street Wednesday night. Few details were available but police spokesman Lt. Marlon Defillo identified the dead woman as Lennaire Alexis, 34. She died shortly after the 9 p.m. accident at Charity Hospital. George Rodrigue, 27, and his wife, Jamie, 20, were in stable condition. Police are asking witnesses to the accident to call Detective Steve Koch at 827-3247.

STAFF PHOTO BY ELIOT KAMENITZ

Band chaperone attacked her during parade, tourist testifies

By JASON BULLOCK
Staff Writer

Testimony resumes today in the trial of a woman accused of attacking an Arizona tourist this year during a Carnival parade.

Connie Norris-Foster, a 15-year volunteer chaperone for the Frederick A. Douglass Senior High School marching band, was charged with simple battery on Samara Whittaker. She is accused of punching Whittaker during the Orpheus parade.

Whittaker, 22, and her fiancee, Carey Cramer, 35, both of Tucson, were visiting New Orleans when they were allegedly attacked by Foster, her son Doneya Allen and Vernon Edwards Feb. 10 as the band paraded down St. Charles Avenue toward Lee Circle. The incident escalated into a melee involving band members, spectators and police, authorities said.

The conflict began when Whittaker tried to cross the parade route as the 75-member band marched near Washington Avenue. Whittaker testified Monday that Foster grabbed her as she attempted to cut through the band and then held Whittaker while Allen punched her.

The couple alerted police and went in search of the band, catching up to it near Lee Circle.

Officer Omar Diaz testified that, when they approached Foster, she grabbed Whittaker's ponytail with one hand and hit her in the head with the other.

Members of the band then joined in, said Diaz, who suffered cuts and bruises. Edwards, 18, has been charged with simple battery on Diaz.

"I wasn't expecting the band members to act like animals," Diaz said.

Cramer said he saw Foster strike his fiancee several times when they attempted to identify the man who punched her earlier. He added Foster encouraged band members to join the fight.

"The band was attacking us using instruments and kicking us," Cramer said.

Much of Tuesday's testimony centered on whether Whittaker hurled insults and racial slurs at Foster and members of the band. Defense attorney David Belfield also called witnesses who contradicted Cramer and Whittaker's version of events about who started the fight.

Foster said Cramer brandished a handgun and aimed it at the band after the first incident.

"I thought (Cramer) was going to shoot both of us," Foster said, referring to her son, who was working as an assistant band director and chaperone. "Then I screamed and ran."

Cramer denied having a gun and said the only ones making racial comments were band members.

"They've made up all sorts of stories to try to cover themselves," Cramer said.

Allen, 22, pleaded no contest to one count of simple battery on Cramer in March. He entered the same plea for misrepresentation for refusing to give his name to police after his arrest.

Allen was one of several defense witnesses who said Foster never struck Whittaker, and her only involvement in the brawl was in trying to break it up.

Penguin chick named Satchmo after drawing

From staff reports



SATCHMO
Terre Gore thought up moniker

And the winner is: Satchmo.

And the other winner is: Terre Gore of St. Rose, who thought up the moniker.

With all due fanfare, a great many giggles and a few peeps from the evening's star attraction, the Aquarium of the America's 4-month-old penguin chick got a name Wednesday night.

In late June, the aquarium launched a contest to dub the baby bird, which hatched on St. Patrick's Day.

Gore was one of several people who submitted the name but won the contest in a drawing.

Satchmo will continue paddling around the aquarium's penguin exhibit in juvenile plumage until its first birthday, whereupon it will trade gray fluff for the tuxedo that typifies the species.

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Paul Rabalais, a dynamic speaker on Estate Planning, has A Masters Degree in Tax Law and has published articles in the Louisiana Bar Journal. His seminars are always informative, entertaining and easy-to-understand.