



HOW MANY DIGITS ARE YOUR DREAM SHOES WORTH?

Women resort to surgery to fit into the latest heels, 4A

WESTSIDE HOPES NEW WAL-MART WILL JUMP-START AREA, 1D

The Charlotte Observer

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PART FOUR OF FOUR ARE THE PLANES WE FLY MORE AT RISK

Experts, relatives call for reforms



TROY ALBURY - SPECIAL TO THE OBSERVER

"Coming back home is the hardest thing, coming home to emptiness," says Janet Albury, shown with her daughter Joanne, at home in the Bahamas. After the loss of her husband and oldest daughter, Janet says she lives for Joanne.

'HUGE AND GROWING PROBLEM'

Lawmakers urge better oversight of outsourced work

BY ELIZABETH LELAND, AMES ALEXANDER AND TED REED
Staff Writers

Airlines and the Federal Aviation Administration must improve oversight of outsourced service and repairs, safety experts and members of Congress say.

An Observer investigation found that the FAA inspects contract maintenance facilities far less often than airline maintenance shops.

U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., the ranking Democrat on the aviation subcommittee, said poor FAA oversight is a "huge and growing problem."

"I would hire a lot more inspectors to put a lot more scrutiny on outsourcing," DeFazio said. "I think we're at a crucial point with all the financial pressures on the industry."

In the past, the industry has successfully focused on some safety issues and, by doing so, reduced the frequency of accidents. The number of crashes caused by pilot error and weather have dropped dramatically because of better technology, design and training.

It is now time, experts say, to focus on maintenance.

SEE INSPECTIONS | 13A

Half a family adjusts to painful gaps in life

STORY SO FAR: US Airways Express Flight 5481 crashes in Charlotte on Jan. 8. When Janet Albury, who lives in the Bahamas, hears the news, she realizes her family may have been on the plane.

BY ELIZABETH LELAND
Staff Writer

Janet Albury rushed home for her family's flight schedule, but could not find it.

Frantic, she telephoned US Airways.

Her husband, Robin, and her 12-year-old daughter, Caitlin, and her brother-in-law Nicholas were flying from Charlotte to Greenville, S.C., that morning.

Were they, she asked, on the flight that crashed?

It was shortly after 9 a.m., just minutes after the crash, and the airline wouldn't say.

For two hours, she waited to hear back.

Her brother came over. Her niece searched through the computer, looking for an old e-mail with their flight number. Friends and family came and went. For two hours, Janet Albury wavered between anguish and hope. Just about everybody in Marsh Harbour knew the Alburys because they ran a hardware store, and soon most of the town waited to hear.

Finally, about 11 a.m., she telephoned US Airways again.

I'm sorry..., said the voice on the other end of the line.

SEE FLIGHT 5481 | 12A

CMS has seized 12 guns in 4 months

Total equals all of last school year, includes .22 at Waddell on Friday

Superintendent says he'll add more searches, security guards after Christmas break

BY ANN DOSS HELMS, CARRIE LEVINE AND MELISSA MANWARE
Staff Writers

Charlotte-Mecklenburg officials have confiscated 12 guns in schools since August, including one in an elementary, matching the total for the full 2002-03 year.

At a news conference Tuesday called to address a gunshot at Marie G. Davis Middle School a day earlier, Superintendent James Pughsley stressed that schools are safe even as reports surfaced of a .22-caliber handgun and bullets confiscated from a student at E.E. Waddell High late Friday.

CMS officials had not told parents about the Waddell incident and Pughsley did not bring it up at the conference. He said later that he was aware of it, but "Wad-

dell was not on my mind at that time. Had I been fully aware I would have mentioned it."

Pughsley said he will step up random metal-detector searches at middle schools and hire an unspecified number of security guards after the Christmas break.

He offered few details of this year's gun incidents, referring to three students with guns on campus and "hard evidence" that CMS has been successful in reducing guns at schools. When asked how many guns had been found this school year, Pughsley said he did not know.

When The Observer asked for a tally afterward, spokeswoman LaTarzja Henry checked reports and said there have been 12 separate incidents.

Henry said Waddell parents SEE WEAPONS | 14A



Pughsley

FORMER VICE PRESIDENT

Gore backing boosts Dean, hurts Edwards

2000 standard-bearer can sway both blacks and white Southerners

BY TIM FUNK AND JIM MORRILL
Staff Writers

Al Gore's high-profile endorsement in the Democratic presidential race could end up fueling Howard Dean's bandwagon at the expense of N.C. Sen. John Edwards and the other candidates.

Several pundits and political operatives said Tuesday the former vice president's decision could clinch Dean victories come January in Iowa and New Hampshire.

Then, Gore's support could effectively end the nomination battle by lifting Dean to stronger-than-expected showings in the Feb. 3 primaries. That's especially true for the first-in-the-South vote in South Carolina, a state Edwards must win.

"South Carolina was going to be the state to stop Dean," said CNN political pollster Bill Schneider. "It may, instead, be the state that puts him over."

With Gore on his team, Dean will now have a formidable seal of approval from an establishment Democrat with strong ties to Afri-



CHARLIE NEIBERGALL - ASSOCIATED PRESS

Former Vice President Al Gore (left) urged Democrats to unite behind front-runner Howard Dean for the presidential nomination.

can Americans and Southern whites - two key groups that have been absent from Dean's coalition.

That could spell trouble for Edwards, retired Gen. Wesley Clark and Sen. Joe Lieberman, all of whom are counting on wins in the Feb. 3 primaries to halt Dean's momentum - and keep their own candidacies alive.

"Al Gore is held in high esteem SEE BACKING | 8A

DEMOCRATS DEBATE

9A | 9 hopefuls discuss Iraq, spar with Ted Koppel in N.H.

ONLY 'COALITION PARTNERS' INCLUDED

French, Germans, Russians barred from Iraq rebuilding

Retaliation criticized by members of Congress

BY DOUGLAS JEHL
New York Times

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon has barred French, German and Russian companies from competing for \$18.6 billion in contracts for the reconstruction of Iraq, saying it was acting to protect "the essential security interests of the United States."

The directive, issued Friday by Paul Wolfowitz, the deputy defense secretary, represents the most substantive retaliation to

date by the Bush administration against U.S. allies who opposed its decision to go to war.

The administration had warned before the war that countries that did not join in a U.S.-led coalition would not have a voice in decisions about the rebuilding of Iraq. But it has not previously made clear that companies in those countries would be excluded from competing for a share of the money for Iraq's reconstruction that the United States approved last month.

Those funds will pay for 26 contracts for rebuilding Iraq's electricity, oil and water sectors and equipping its army.

SEE IRAQ | 16A

SUICIDE BOMBING IN IRAQ



LAURENT REBOURS - ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

Dozens of U.S. soldiers hurt

As many as 59 U.S. troops were injured Tuesday when a bomber stormed a military base west of Mosul. Iraqi owners of a computer shop (above) facing the base clean up afterward. A second suicide attack killed only the bomber. See story, 17A.

Weather

RAIN: High: 55. Low: 38. Gusty wind, showers today. Windy, cooler tonight. Full forecast, 8B

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