

Comedy to sing about

The Blanks: From 'Scrubs' to NH | NHWeekend



TO THE JURY

Manchester officer's assault trial | B1

"There is nothing so powerful as truth" DANIEL WEBSTER

NEW HAMPSHIRE UNION LEADER

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Switchblade knives now legal in NH

◆ **Stiletos, dirk and dagger knives, too:** Supporters say how a knife opens isn't important.

By DAN TUOHY
New Hampshire Union Leader

Switchblades, the spring-loaded knives that government went to great lengths to restrict after their menacing use in films like "Rebel

Without a Cause" and "West Side Story," are now legal in New Hampshire.

A new state law signed by Gov. John Lynch on Tuesday removes the penalty for carrying or selling switchblades — along with stiletos,

dirk and dagger knives. "All we did was get rid of an old, antiquated law that was enacted in the 1950s," said Rep. Jennifer Coffey, R-Andover, prime sponsor of the legislation. "We need laws on criminal activities, not on objects."

The bill took shape after Coffey,

► See **Knives**, Page A10



Coin toss sends budget to panel

◆ **House bill prevails:** Conference committee will decide if gambling or taxes close \$300 million budget gap.

By TOM FAHEY
State House Bureau Chief

CONCORD — Charges of blackmail and coercion, plus an actual coin toss, all figured in debate and backroom maneuvering that moved budget work forward yesterday.

A written agreement between House and Senate leaders states they tossed a coin to see whose bill would carry budget measures meant to solve the state's \$300 million deficit.

The agreement will allow two budget bills to go into the committee of conference process. The talks are meant

► See **Budget**, Page A16

'It just hurts so much'

Claremont family struggles to get back on its feet after boy's death

By MELANIE PLENDIA
Union Leader Correspondent

CLAREMONT

IT ACHES in Brenda Wheeler's bones like a flu, but it's not the flu. This pain can't be fixed with some rest or a pill. It doesn't go away. It's the kind of empty ache that never gets filled, a void she can't describe in words.

"It just hurts so much," she said, a mix of anguish and near surprise at the level of pain she's capable of feeling. "I wish it would stop hurting just a little, but I know it will be a long time before that happens."

Wheeler stood in her son Andrew's room, staring at pictures of the 11-year-old, placing her hand in the plaster handprint the hospital made for her before Wheeler was taken off life support April 23.

► See **Claremont**, Page A16



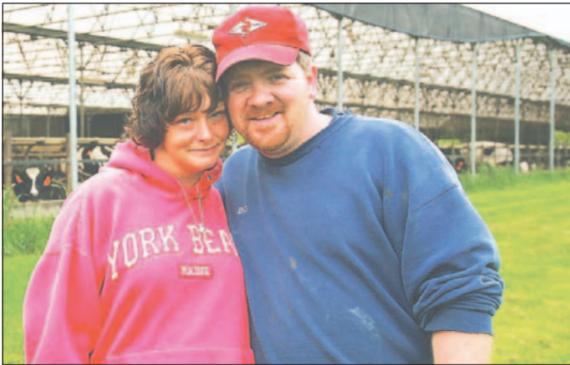
FAMILY PHOTO

His parents hope to put a photo of Andy Wheeler holding the first turkey he bagged on his headstone.



JESSE BAKER

Brenda Wheeler thumbs through a photo book created in her son's memory by his classmates at Maple Avenue Elementary School. Andy's room is filled with mementos from his life.



JESSE BAKER

Brenda and Kenny Wheeler stand near the solar barn that houses the hundreds of cows their son Andy used to play around daily.

"They took the respirator out and he coughed. And of course, that gave me hope. 'He's coughing, is he trying to breathe?' ... Kenny helped me get his neck on my arm. And I held him, and his heart beat for about 15 times. And then he went."

BRENDA WHEELER
recounting her final moments with her son Andy

Policy of 'social promotion' ripe for change

◆ **Monday meeting:** Parents, teachers say promoting students who are failing just to keep them with their peers is a major problem.

By BETH LaMONTAGNE HALL
New Hampshire Union Leader

MANCHESTER — Students who don't learn what is expected of their grade level shouldn't be pushed on to the next grade anyway, say city officials looking to change district policy on student promotion.

A group of West High School parents and teachers told the mayor last week students are not always adequately

► See **Policy**, Page A16

Dean Kamen talks about the technology behind the new soda machine his company developed for Coca-Cola on Monday in Manchester.

JOSH GIBNEY
UNION LEADER



Kamen sees future with pure water

◆ **Partnering with Coca-Cola:** Inventor wants to use firm's global distribution network to reach developing world.

By DENIS PAISTE
New Hampshire Union Leader

MANCHESTER — Dean Kamen is most

excited about what his firm's relationship with the Coca-Cola Co. means for two projects dear to his heart: bringing pure water to the world's needy and FIRST, the competitive high school science and engineering program.

While Kamen's DEKA Research and Development Corp. has been developing a new soft-drink dispenser for Coca-Cola, the 59-year-old inventor has been working on a vapor compression distiller to bring pure water to the developing world. Although there is no

► See **Kamen**, Page A16

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A Small Prayer

When we are searching for the right answer, Lord, may we come to You through prayer. Amen

Today's Chuckle

Where there's a will there's a way... to squeeze dozens of relatives into one lawyer's office at the same time.

New Hampshire Union Leader

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Today IN NEW HAMPSHIRE'S NEWSPAPER

NEW HAMPSHIRE

SPORTS

Bodi is right to fight

Based on what is publicly known so far, embattled Liquor Commission Chairman Mark Bodi is right to stay on and attempt to clear his name in an open forum, says today's lead editorial. ► Page A14

BUSINESS

Jobs to be back —by 2012

New Hampshire is on track to regain all the jobs it lost in the Great Recession by the middle of 2012, an economist said yesterday, and the state's economy is expected to grow at an average annual rate of 3.8 percent for the period from 2009 through 2014, which is 0.3 percentage points higher than the projection for New England. ► Page B3

Monarchs host Hershey tonight

Suddenly the shoe is on the other foot as the Manchester Monarchs get set to host the struggling Hershey Bears in the AHL playoffs tonight. ► Page D1

NATION

Obama condemns Arizona

Confronting soaring frustration over illegal immigration, President Barack Obama yesterday condemned Arizona's crackdown and pushed instead for a federal fix the nation could embrace. He said that will never happen without Republican support, pleading: "I need some help." ► Page A5

Today's Letters: Page A15

ACROSS THE GENERATIONS



Keeping history alive

Young veterans swap stories and visit with World War II veterans. ► Page B1



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In Brief

Gilford man faces felony drug charges

GILFORD — A three-month investigation by the New Hampshire Attorney General's Drug Task Force culminated yesterday morning with the arrest of a Gilford man on several felony charges.

Karim Bennett, 33, is facing felony charges of possession with intent to distribute cocaine, Oxycontin and marijuana after being arrested at 42 Gilford East Drive yesterday around 9:30 a.m. Members of the Gilford and Laconia police departments joined task force members in executing the search warrant that led to Bennett's arrest.

Police said they also found several guns, including a high-powered pistol and shotgun, in a addition to a heavy ballistic vest at the address.

Bennett was held at the Belknap County Jail on \$100,000 cash only bail and is scheduled to be arraigned this morning IN Laconia District Court.

Monadnock advisory group holds meeting

JAFFREY — The Monadnock Advisory Commission will

hold a meeting Thursday, May 27, at 4 p.m. The meeting will be held in the Jaffrey Civic Center, 40 Main St., Jaffrey.

The Commission will receive an update from State Parks Director Ted Austin regarding the Ten-Year Strategic Development and Capital Improvement Plan. Updates will also be received regarding the Gilson Pond Campground, the Monadnock Guide and the 2010 MERE.

The Monadnock Advisory Commission was established to recommend policies affecting the recreational use of Mount Monadnock and Gap Mountain.

Leadership group graduates several

BERLIN — Leadership North Country — North of the Notches held its graduation May 11.

Participants included Todd Ross, Joanne Archambault, Tom Austin, Tamara Allen, Laurie Carrier, Brian Walker, Kathy Frenette, Diane Alinovi and Elizabeth Thompson.

Leadership North Country works to enhance the skills of its participants by providing them with information and resources in and outside the region, and encourages them

to take on projects separately and together.

Part of the leadership development program of White Mountains Community College, the program is funded in part by Public Service of New Hampshire, the NH Charitable Foundation and the Neil and Louise Tillotson Fund.

Leadership North Country consists of nine monthly sessions at various sites throughout the North Country.

Applications for Leadership North Country is open with classes beginning in September.

For more information, contact Tamara Allen at 752-1113, ext. 3062.

Coast Guard sets family open house

GILFORD — The Coast Guard is hosting an open house and family fair next month at its station on Route 1A.

The open house is scheduled for June 5 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. and includes instructions on boat safety.

Coast Guard personnel will be on hand to answer questions and the public can also make appointments for a free safety inspection of their boat.

SEA releases details of health plan accord

◆ **State workers:** Rank-and-file to vote on proposed coverage.

By **MARK HAYWARD**
New Hampshire Union Leader

Most state workers would have incentives to save on health care, and health care would be extended to their adult children under a proposed contract that labor leaders backed last night.

Leaders of the State Employees' Association of New Hampshire disclosed details of the pact last night, after it won near unanimous endorsement of the union's bargaining Senate.

The contract still must be ratified by the nearly 6,000 rank-and-file SEA members. It would implement a program, similar to that used by the city of Manchester, that offers financial incentives for workers to select low-cost health care providers.

It also includes mail-order prescription and smoking cessation programs. The union estimates it will save \$3.4 million next year and another \$2 million in 2012.

"This agreement protects

public services and saves tax dollars during this time of economic challenges," said SEA President Gary Smith.

"We're pleased (with the Senate vote)," said Colin Manning, spokesman for Gov. John Lynch. "This is a good agreement."

SEA negotiator Dennis Kinnan said another provision extends health care to adult children of state workers up to the age of 26.

The provision applies to adult children who were insured by the contract as of May 1. In January, a provision of national health care reform extends a parent's coverage to any child under the age of 26.

"Come the first of January, they would have had to put everyone on anyway," Kinnan said.

State law currently requires insurance companies to include the adult-child coverage in their health plans. The state is self-funded, so the law did not cover state workers, Manning said. The contract now provides that coverage, he said.

Details of the health care changes will still have to be finalized by the Health Benefit Advisory Committee, the SEA

said.

The pact would run until June 30, 2011, and cover between 10,000 and 11,000 state workers.

It includes no cost-of-living raise, but longevity-based step raises would continue under the contract.

Also, the SEA will contribute \$200,000 to study the creation of a tax-sheltered medical trust to fund retiree health care. And state workers could take voluntary furloughs to avoid a layoff of a fellow worker.

Voting is expected to begin next Wednesday, and ballots would have to be postmarked by June 8 or 9.

Last fall, the SEA and state tentatively agreed to a contract, but members rejected it and about 200 workers lost their jobs. Many have since returned to work.

Officials did not expect a similar outcome this time around.

"I think both sides are pretty happy how it ended up," Kinnan said.

The Legislature has already funded salaries and employee benefits, Manning said. But the contract must be reviewed by the Joint Committee on Employee Relations.

Continued From Page A1

Knives

the vice president of the Andover Rescue Squad, was looking for a new tool for her job as an emergency medical technician. She was looking for an all-in-one tool with an automatic mechanism, a knife that would free up use of one hand.

As she shopped around, Coffey said she discovered what she wanted she could not legally buy in the state. And though state law provided an exemption for EMTs, along with law enforcement, hunters and others, she found the exemption

would not apply when she was off-duty.

Coffey said there are more than 125 occupations or hobbies in which knives are primary tools.

"We don't need to penalize hunters, fisherman, mountain climbers," she said.

The more she researched, the more Coffey said she found the old law was being selectively enforced. It had to be, she reasoned, given the many blades, automatic or otherwise, that are used daily by people.

Coffey said at the state's pop-

ular Highland Games, people dressing in Scottish attire with a traditional Scottish dirk were technically in violation of the law, but were not rounded up and arrested.

But people elsewhere were being brought up on charges.

Abe Foote, of Abe's Awesome Armaments in New Hampton, was one of them. He said he was arrested, charged and taken to court in 2002 after he sold a knife to a police officer. Foote estimates the case cost him about \$7,000, including legal costs, fines and loss of inventory and sales.

Foote, who testified in support of Coffey's bill, said the law was antiquated and selectively enforced. "It was a good thing that this law was repealed

so that no other law-abiding citizen has to go through what I went through," he said last night.

The bipartisan bill sailed through the New Hampshire Legislature, with committees hearing support for the change from law enforcement officers, wildlife groups and outdoors people.

As Coffey put it, "There are enough laws on the books to cover criminal intent."

The old law subjected a person guilty of carrying or selling switchblades, stiletos, or dagger and dirk knives to a misdemeanor, and the knives were required to "be confiscated to the use of the state."

The prohibition in RSA 159:16 still holds for blackjacks, slung

shots (a weight on the end of a flexible piece of cord or chain) and brass knuckles, and it is still illegal for a felon to have a knife, said Evan F. Nappen, a Concord attorney who has literally written the book on the subject, "New Hampshire Gun, Knife, & Weapon Law."

Nappen said the old law was vague to begin with, possibly as part of the regulatory rush on switchblades by federal and state governments in the late 1950s. For example, he said, the law called them "switch knives," not switchblades, and they were not properly defined in statute. They are also known as automatic knives.

The state Legislature has recognized that how a knife opens has no bearing on whether the knife is good or bad, said Doug Ritter, chairman of Knife Rights Inc., a non-profit advocacy group, who testified in support of the bill. He said there are 27 states where automatic knives

are legal and he believes the New Hampshire law is the first complete repeal of knife restrictions in a state.

"It makes a clear statement that people in this great country are fed up with irrational and illogical laws that restrict them for no good reason," he said. "It is a real statement that this is a country where freedom counts, where we don't penalize honest, law-abiding folks just because some people have an emotional reaction against something."

The "emotional reaction" came from what Ritter called the Hollywood exploitation of switchblades.

Nappen, who also provides counsel to Knife Rights Inc., gave a similar nod to the rival gangs in "West Side Story" to try to de-mystify the switchblade. "The Sharks and the Jets are in their 80s now," he said, "I don't think we have to worry about them."

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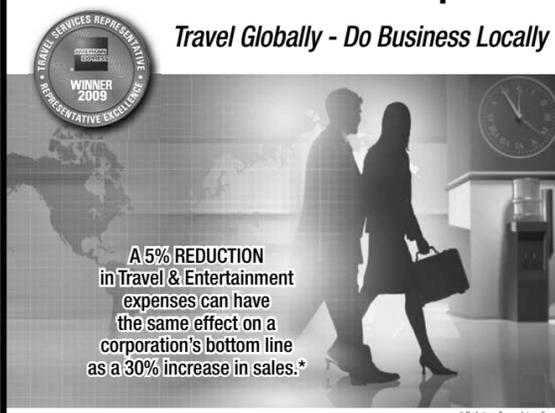
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