



Laredo Morning Times

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TUESDAY, August 22, 2000

120th Year - Number 070 / 26 pages

TODAY
in the **TIMES**

Child's cry stops injections

BY MIGUEL T. RAMIREZ
Times staff writer

NUEVO LAREDO — A Laredo, Texas, woman was apprehended here Monday — accused of endangering her three young daughters, according to Assistant State Attorney General Ricardo Rodriguez de los Santos.

The woman, Rodriguez de los Santos said, was planning to inject her children with heroin then herself, in an alleged

planned murder-suicide attempt.

The suspect, Liliana Verastegui, 20, stopped after the 3-year-old cried out as the mother started inserting a hypodermic needle allegedly filled with heroin.

Police quoted the woman as saying she could not make herself inject the children and didn't understand why she wanted to do it, citing no problems with family or money.

Verastegui and her three

daughters checked into the Monterrey Hotel, in the Mirador neighborhood Sunday afternoon, a State Ministerial Police report stated. This was confirmed by hotel manager Erika Piña Lara.

Verastegui said, before checking into the hotel, that she bought hypodermic needles in a downtown pharmacy and then found a man who sold her several doses of heroin.

Piña Lara said the mother seemed calm and didn't notice

any nervousness in her behavior.

The hotel manager told ministerial police what happened after hearing loud noises coming from the room.

"I got to see what was happening. I heard commotion coming through the floor and went to the room. I was scared because I saw the girls crying, and called the police and the Red Cross," Piña Lara was quoted by police investigators.

"Emergency personnel came and treated Liliana

and her 3-year-old daughter."

Police officials said when they entered the room they saw an empty beer bottle, a cigarette made from a green herb and eight small aluminum foil packets filled with a brownish substance.

Red Cross personnel examined Verastegui and the 3-year-old daughter in the emergency room, keeping them under observation until 7 a.m. Monday, according to the police (See *CRY Page 10A)

State



Protesters march against Boy Scouts/ Page 4A

Sports



Texas team loses in LL/ Page 1B



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OPINION PAGE

But that will be a hard sale to an American public that has become accustomed to having a weaker, poorer nation to the south.

--Jack Anderson

TODAY'S WEATHER
See Page 2A for complete weather information
Recycled newsprint is used in the printing of the Times.

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DO YOU KNOW

CARLA PATRICIA VERASTEGUI?
A department store sales clerk, she enjoys walking and dancing.



Prayer helps veteran

BY CHUCK OWEN
Times staff writer

He was supposed to die — but he didn't.

Noel Martinez's mother, Petrita, believes that her prayers were answered. Her son still lives today, and she calls that a miracle.

Noel was one of the many who were injured severely in Vietnam just over 32 years ago. He came out with a piece of shrapnel the size of a button lodged inside his skull. He still lives with it today because the doctors are afraid to try to remove it, fearing they will severely paralyze him, or worse.

Noel was told over and over that he could not make it, he said, the last time at Walter Reed Hospital in Washington D.C, where he went for a discharge examination.

In Vietnam, Noel and his



MEMORIES: Vietnam veteran Noel Martinez and his mother Petrita show Purple Hearts he received while serving in Vietnam 32 years ago. Portraits on the table show Noel in military uniforms.

patrol squad came upon one of the infamous North Vietnamese booby traps and it changed his life forever, but he lived.

He said the booby trap his squad came in contact with on

June 30, 1968 was made from what they called a "pineapple grenade." He was somewhere in the jungles of Vietnam, but he doesn't know exactly where.

He explained the enemy

would take one of these grenades, wrap the body and the firing lever of the grenade in green vine and then remove the firing pin. The green vine would hold the spring-loaded (See *PRAYER Page 10A)

El Cenizo wants land back

BY CHUCK OWEN
Times staff writer

El Cenizo gave Webb County land in 1995, and now wants it back.

Actually, Alianza Nueva Generacion por el Parque de El Cenizo (New Generation Alliance for El Cenizo Park) is saying the land should not have been given away.

Alianza spokeswoman Angela Stuesse said the problem surfaced when a group of El Cenizo citizens decided they wanted to improve and clean up the park. When citizens approached city hall about improvements funding, they found the city did not own the property, but that it belonged to Webb County.

According to a warranty deed copy dated Oct. 4, 1995, the mayor of El Cenizo signed off on transfer of ownership of a little over 14 acres to Webb County. The copy shows the deed to be notarized

by Cordelia L. Valdez and receipt by County Clerk Henry Flores for file on Oct. 10, 1995.

Also in existence is documentation of an Aug. 23, 1995 city of El Cenizo meeting resolution, an agreement between the city and Webb County, relating to the operation of the sewer plant, on the land's location.

Alianza has received the support of the Texas Rural Legal Aid attorney Israel M. Reyna, who is trying to resolve the problem through negotiation.

In its political efforts Alianza has received the support of the city of El Cenizo, causing the city to pass a resolution dated Aug. 10, 2000, to reclaim the parkland through "peaceful, political resolution," seeking to "avoid litigation."

Reyna and Stuesse believe that the land was transferred illegally by the city administration in 1995. They think there should have been an elec- (See *LAND Page 10A)



AT PLAY: El Cenizo children play soccer at a park Monday that was deeded to Webb County, which the community wants back.



Derailed

Officials confer with each other near the area where cars from an Amtrak train derailed Monday in downtown Lake City, S.C. Nine cars of Amtrak's Silver Meteor passenger train derailed on tracks that had been damaged by a street sweeper. Forty passengers, none seriously injured, were taken to hospitals.

Bomb threat causes bridges to close

BY KELLY HILDEBRANDT
Times staff writer

All four international bridges were shut down for about an hour Monday night after a bomb threat was called into the police, according to authorities.

At about 8:30 p.m., officials said, someone called the Laredo Police Department dispatch office and said there was a bomb on one of the bridges.

Since the person didn't specify which bridge, all four bridges were closed, said Rafael Garcia, Laredo's bridge director.

Both Laredo and Nuevo Laredo fire departments were then called in to check the bridges for anything suspicious, said Laredo Fire Chief Alfredo Equigua of District 1.

"We do a walk through and look for something suspicious or anything that's not supposed to be there," Equigua said.

As well as searching the surface of the bridge firefighters also scan underneath the bridge when a bomb threat is called in, Equigua said

Garcia said that bomb threats are more common during the summer and the first few weeks when school begins. Bomb threats have been made concerning at least one of the bridges for the past two weeks.

"But, we take each one very, very seriously," Garcia said. "We never take anything for granted." (Staff writer Kelly Hildebrandt can be reached at 728-2568 or by e-mail at kelly@lmtonline.com)

*Webb

(Continued from Page 1A)

was set up in the courtroom for the jury. The display, with a blue background, had the pictures of all eight defendants indicted in the FBI investigation.

It included Webb County Assistant Prosecutors Ernesto Cavazos, Ramon Villafranca and investigator Domingo Dimas, even though they were not on trial.

Below the defendant's pictures were listed the 32 "fixed" cases alleged by the government.

Attending the closing arguments were some relatives of the defendants, a couple of Laredo attorneys and a large number of FBI agents and office support staff.

As he presented his argument, DeGabrielle said that while the defense team wants them not to accept the testimony of the government witnesses as truthful because they are drug dealers and drunk drivers, he said these are the only people that could testify in this case.

The prosecutor said the witnesses faced "peril and risk" in opposing Webb County's "power structure."

In his closing arguments, defense attorney Antonio Figueroa showed the jury a picture of a pirate ship that he said was loaded with government witnesses as the attorney tried to discredit them.

DeGabrielle later agreed on calling it a pirate ship but said the "captains" of the vessel were the five defendants.

The prosecutor urged the jury to return a guilty verdict as charged in the indictment.

Defense attorney Roger Rocha, who represents Castañeda, went after the government's star witness, Jesse Salas, who he described as a highly paid informant and a liar.

The attorney said the government's taped recordings of his client and the others only has phrases such as "help me" with my case and nothing to do with "fix my case."

Rocha, like the rest of the attorneys, went back over some of the transcripts presented by the government. He again told the jury that Castañeda was not guilty of bribery or interfering with commerce.

He charged that the government lacked evidence or had misleading evidence against the defendants.

In his closing arguments, Figueroa also told the jury that they could not hold against his client the fact that Rodriguez chose to remain silent and not testify.

Figueroa explained to the jury that they would find documentation showing that some of the cases reduced or vehicle released was done under somebody else's decision and not

Rodriguez.

Attorney John Convery, who represents Carlos Rubio, said the government was trying to prosecute Rubio using drug abusers and dealers. He said, only with the help of the FBI did the drug abusers come up with stories on how to help themselves (against charges) and the government.

Convery asked the jury to throw out the witnesses' testimony and his client case because it lacked evidence.

In his closing statement, Jose Salvador Tellez said the most difficult situation for him was convincing the panel that his client was innocent.

Tellez told the jury that the government wanted them to search the case's circumstantial evidence to the farthest point of imagination.

The attorney also went over several points of the evidence including the testimony of bondsmen Gabriel Castillo and Ricardo Tenorio.

Assistant U.S. Prosecutor Marina Garcia Marmolejo, who opened the final arguments, told the jury that it did not matter if the case involved drug dealers, weapons or DWI drivers, justice was for, "sale in our community."

"There was a great need for the (FBI) investigation of the community," as criminals were walking away after buying justice, Garcia told the jury.

The assistant prosecutor provided the jury a detailed explanation and provided the cases that were fixed as part of the alleged conspiracy, which is count one.

Defense attorney Jose Luis Ramos, who represents Rubio Sr., said the only people buying justice were the federal prosecutors because their witnesses were selling them the testimony.

Ramos told the jury that the federal government's case fell short of proving that the Webb County District Attorney's Office was corrupted and, therefore, there were no violations of the Hobbs Act or extortion.

There are violations here, but that will be the matter for another jury, another time and other charges, Ramos told the jury.

It has been the argument of defense attorneys that the only violations shown are state violations, such as practicing law without a license.

Ramos told the jury not to allow the federal government to fool them by bringing witnesses that they would not trust in their own homes. If you cannot trust them in your home, don't send the defendants to the penitentiary on their word.

Ramos also detailed several cases in the counts involving Rubio and the contraction in testimony from several witnesses.

The attorney explained that the criminals that provided testimony for the government were now dealing not for drugs with federal prosecutors,



Times staff photo by J. MICHAEL SHORT

Healthy lifestyle

Renowned author Deepak Chopra, M.D., seated left, signs a book for JoNell Buchanan of Austin, Indiana, during last Saturday's Silva International symposium at the Laredo Civic Center. Chopra has authored over 25 books worldwide and is credited with popularizing the Ayevedic system of medicine and health in the West, and is highly regarded for his scientific illumination of processes of personal development and transformation.

but for freedom from prison.

The defense attorney said prosecutors changed the direction of their case after some four weeks of testimony and realizing they could not prove their case, so they tried making Rubio Sr. a public official.

Assistant U.S. Prosecutor Trey Martinez said people were arrested, promises of case fixing were made, money was exchanged and results were provided.

Martinez said, in order for Rubio and Castañeda to provide those services, they needed people at the district attorney's office, such as the investigators he labeled as public officials.

"The law is only as strong as the people who protect it," Martinez said to the jury, adding that

they (jurors) could bring back the integrity in Webb County.

He, like Garcia, urged the jury to return a guilty verdict on all the defendants.

The prosecutor also argued that since the drug dealers, DWI drivers and weapons violators were going off unpunished, they would continue affecting interstate commerce because they went on with no deterrent.

Martinez also went over several cases matching documents, taped conversations and testimony to defendants and how the government had proven their allegations.

(Staff writer Robert Garcia can be reached at 728-265 or by e-mail at robert@lmtonline.com)

*Council

(Continued from Page 1A)

house is sitting at the end of the road and several times over the past years cars have run into the front of it.

Robert Murillo, acting traffic director, said he is creating a list of areas, particularly in school zones, where speed humps need to be placed and that Chaparral Street is included in the list.

"It's been a miracle that no one's been hurt," Valdez, Jr. said. "We need to be able to give them some piece of mind."

The city has also tried to put up some sort of blockade, like a fence, in front of the house but due to liability issues was not able to, Dovalina said.

Currently, the Planning and Zoning Commission, when subdivisions are being developed, dissuades such long roadways or placing houses in front of dead ends, said Keith Selman, director of planning and zoning.

"We shouldn't allow it," Flores said of the design.

Selman said he would with staff to create a design criteria for developers to follow.

While speed humps will help the problem, Councilman John Galo said the problem is in that people are driving so fast down the road. (Staff writer Kelly Hildebrandt can be reached at 728-2568 or by e-mail at kelly@lmtonline.com)

*Taxes

(Continued from Page 1A)

December. The board cautioned that district residents failing to pay their taxes on or before Jan. 31, 2001 would be subject to allowable penalties and collection costs.

Approval of the 2000-2001 budget came after only a brief session of clarification and went through with only one amendment, requested by District VII trustee Cookie Muller and District II trustee Efrain Sanchez.

Amended was budgeting for two unfilled positions, including an Assistant Superintendent for Planning and Administration position and a Director of Planning position.

Budget presenter Laida Benavides stated that the amendment would save USD about \$158,000.

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be reached at 728-2564 or by e-mail at chucko@lmtonline.com)

*Park

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done it." Reyna's story had El Cenizo giving up more land to Webb County than was necessary in the conveyance of sewer plant property the county took over in 1995 at the request of the Texas Natural Resources Conservation Commission and giving the land up without a vote of the people.

The original conveyance was more than 14 acres.

County Attorney Homero Ramirez added that the land in question was part of land once owned by developer Cecil McDonald.

A bankruptcy court order caused the county to assume maintenance and operation of the sewer plant facilities. Afterward, El Cenizo and Webb County entered an interlocal agreement, whereby the county took over operations to ensure state regulatory compliance. The county attorney said a recorded deed transferred the land to the county.

The commissioners court, however, put that aside and approved the return of a portion of the land to El Cenizo, with provisos that El Cenizo take responsibility for maintenance and that the site be dedicated for recreational use only.

From a plot displayed by County Engineer Tomas Rodriguez, Commissioner Jorge De La Garza, Precinct One, moved to deed to El Cenizo the land not needed for the sewer plant operation.

Rodriguez's plot display used a coloring scheme on an El Cenizo area map, showing the land in question abutting the Rio Grande.

He colored an area in green that would be necessary for continued sewer plant operation. A red area was what he said could be deeded to the city. The red area was the area of De La Garza's motion.

The El Cenizo group was pleased with the day's transaction, said Alianza Generacion representative Angela Stuesse, as she departed the courtroom. (Staff writer Chuck Owen can