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"State of the State"



**A NEAR MISS**  
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COUNTRIES RUSH TO HAITI'S AID AFTER CATASTROPHIC QUAKE

## Thousands feared dead



AP photos

People search for survivors Wednesday under the rubble of a collapsed building in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. A 7.0-magnitude earthquake that hit Haiti on Tuesday flattened the president's palace, the cathedral, hospitals, schools and the main prison. Below right, a man carries an injured child outside the Hotel Villa Creole in Port-au-Prince. Below middle, a man trapped in a collapsed building responds to questions from rescue workers. Left, one of the injured is tended at a Port-au-Prince hotel.



By Jonathan M. Katz  
Associated Press

**PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti** — Dazed survivors wandered past dead bodies in rubble-strewn streets Wednesday, crying for loved ones, and rescuers desperately searched collapsed buildings as fear rose that the death toll from Haiti's devastating earthquake could reach into the tens of thousands.

See **MANY TRAPPED** on A4

## Locals shaken by news — or lack thereof

By Merritt Melancon  
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Many Athenians with ties to quake-stricken Haiti still are waiting anxiously to hear from friends and loved ones, while recent visitors to the poverty-stricken nation try to wrap their heads around the gruesome television footage coming from the capital of Port-au-Prince.

AT [WWW.ONLINEATHENS.COM](http://WWW.ONLINEATHENS.COM)

■ See a photo gallery documenting the aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti.

"Every time you recall a quote or a name or a face, and you put yourself back in the place where you experienced that — you realize that place is gone," said Robert Peterson, a University of Georgia art student

who traveled to Haiti last month. "You're remembering houses that are no longer there."

A major earthquake shook the Haitian capital and its surrounds for almost a minute about 5 p.m. Tuesday, destroying hundreds of homes and public buildings and killing tens of thousands of people.

See **CONCERN** on A4



ABH PARENT COMPANY

## Morris filing prepackaged bankruptcy

Morris News Service

Morris Publishing Group, which operates 13 daily newspapers including the Athens Banner-Herald, announced Wednesday that it will seek a bankruptcy judge's assistance in completing its financial restructuring plan.

Augusta-based Morris Publishing was unable to obtain the nearly unanimous support needed for a debt swap from creditors and intends to file Chapter 11 bankruptcy before next Wednesday.

Morris Publishing previously said it would seek a prepackaged bankruptcy if it could not get support from the holders of 99 percent of the debt.

The reorganization plan is not expected to have any noticeable impact on Morris' ongoing operations.

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FUNNY MONEY

## Vigilant clerks help stem rash of fake bills

By Joe Johnson  
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Sara Phillips sometimes acts more like a U.S. Secret Service agent than a convenience store manager.

Each time a customer at the Kangaroo Express on U.S. Highway 29 North hands her a greenback, she rubs it between her fingers. Sometimes, she'll bring it close to her eye, then hold it up to the light to see if there's anything unusual.

"We've had a lot of counterfeit money this year," Phillips said. "There was a rash where we were found five counterfeit bills in one afternoon."

Counterfeiters began flooding the Athens area with bogus bills late last summer, with police sometimes taking six or more reports each day. Things have quieted down over the past month or so, and the people on the front lines — vigilant store clerks and managers — are one of the reasons.

"I would think that's a good



Tricia Spaulding/Staff

Sara Phillips, store manager at the Kangaroo Express on U.S. Highway 29 North, checks the authenticity of a customer's \$20 dollar bill Wednesday morning.

part of it, because people can't pass the counterfeits as easily anymore," said Athens-Clarke police Detective Beverly Russell. "Stores just aren't accepting them as readily."

"It's a due diligence thing," said

Mike Griffith, president of the Golden Pantry chain that owns more than two dozen convenience stores in the region.

See **CLERKS** on A4

RESTAURANTS CLOSED



File/Staff

A crowd gathers outside Harry Bissett's in downtown Athens during a Mardi Gras celebration in 2004.

## Bissett's may sell

Taxes delinquent

By Don Nelson  
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The owner of both Harry Bissett's restaurants in Athens — closed since Jan. 1 over delinquent taxes — hopes to reopen by selling the businesses or paying off the taxes so he can regain his liquor license.

Harry Bissett's New Orleans Style Cafe and Oyster Bar, a downtown fixture at 279 E. Broad St., and Harry Bissett's Bayou Grill at 1155 Mitchell Bridge Road closed Jan. 1 after the state refused to renew the liquor licenses because of delinquent sales taxes.

Nevertheless, owner Jim White hopes to reopen one or both restaurants.

Hurt by the bad economy, high food costs and stiffer competition, the restaurants got behind on remitting sales taxes to the state Department of Revenue, and the state will not issue a liquor license to a business with delinquent taxes, White said.

At least five people have inquired about buying the 23-year-old business — either one restaurant or both, he said.

"We're trying to get it worked out," White said. "I should have an answer by Friday on whether we have a buyer."

Without a buyer, White said he may close the downtown restaurant, which he bought into in 1997, and reopen the Mitchell Bridge business, opened in 2006.

The restaurants employ 100 people.

Besides sales taxes, White owes \$3,174 to the Athens-Clarke government for the Mitchell Bridge site, according to Athens-Clarke tax officials.