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BOSTON TOPS

SPORTS D1

Atwater gets a jump
on motorcycle park

LOCAL B1

SANDY MUSH NOW THE JOHN LATORRACA ADULT CORRECTIONAL FACILITY

RENAMED JAIL HONORS FORMER SHERIFF



SUN-STAR PHOTO BY JACK BLAND

Emotions rise as Marion Harvey, widow of former Merced County Sheriff John Latorraca, looks down at a memorial dedicated to her husband Wednesday morning. The ceremony, which was hosted by the county sheriff's department, included the renaming of Sandy Mush Adult Correctional Facility to the John Latorraca Correctional Facility.

By Mike De La Cruz
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EL NIDO — Most people know it as Sandy Mush.

But now, the Merced County Adult Correctional Facility officially has a new name — The John Latorraca Correctional Facility.

The 14-year-old jail at 2584 Sandy Mush Road was renamed Wednesday in honor of the late John Latorraca, who served as Merced County's 16th sheriff. Latorraca oversaw the old Belcher Avenue Honor Farm on the same site, which later became the adult correctional facility, said Merced County Undersheriff Bill Blake.

At Wednesday morning's rededication ceremony at the entrance to the 137-acre jail site, Sheriff Mark Pazin introduced the many members of Latorraca's family and several people who remembered him, including former sheriffs Bill Amis, Jerry Brockman and Gary

Carlson, and representatives from the Merced County Board of Supervisors and Merced County Probation Department.

Eight deputies unveiled the 28-foot-long granite monument bearing the etched name of the jail as well as that of the Iris Garrett Juvenile Justice Complex, which is housed on the sprawling jail property and opened Aug. 12.

Sally Latorraca, John Latorraca's youngest daughter, said the dedication of the facility was a terrific tribute to her father, who dedicated his life to law enforcement.

Dario "Dine" Latorraca, the former sheriff's youngest brother, also was at the ceremony.

"I think it's wonderful because he was a real county man," he said.

John Latorraca succeeded Nathan Lucius Cornell as sheriff in 1957, remaining in office for 16 years, making

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John Latorraca was Merced County sheriff starting in 1957 and served 16 years, the second-longest serving sheriff in county history.

Measure H may add to jail overcrowding

By Doane Yawger
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Measure H, the local tax-increase proposal on Tuesday's ballot, seems to a lot of people like a great idea.

It would put more cops on the streets. More officers means more arrests, and in an area where crime is among citizens' top concerns, that sounds good, right?

More arrests mean more inmates. Merced County's two jails are already so overcrowded that many inmates serve only fractions of their terms, and top law enforcement officials hold out little hope the situation will improve anytime soon.

While Sheriff Mark Pazin, Undersheriff Bill Blake and jail commanders John Burk and Rick Thoreson don't dispute the need for more police offi-

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UC Merced Magazine inside today's Sun-Star

The university updates us on how the campus is developing and what programs are already offered.

See the insert.



Electorate impassioned
about this year's vote

Politics, vandalism in the mix

By David Chircop
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Boiling divisions in this caustic political season could be behind a spate of vandalism at Democratic and Republican headquarters in Merced in recent weeks.

The two downtown offices are on opposite sides of N Street, not far from each other — a brick's throw away.

Phone lines ripped out, car tires punctured, threatening phone calls and a broken window are a few examples of vandalism at Democratic and Republican campaign headquarters in Merced since Labor Day, and mirrors the growing list of other vandalism and violence complaints reported by campaign workers across the country.

Officials with both camps in Merced are denouncing the vandalism, saying they will fire any workers engaging in inappropriate behavior.

But the incidents seem to underscore what some political observers are calling one of the most divisive presidential races ever.

Robin Adam, senior policy adviser to Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced, called the acts "worrisome stuff."

Adam is one of three people to have a tire punctured while parked in front of the Democratic headquarters on Main Street.

Someone apparently inserted a bolt into one of his back tires on Oct. 15.

Adam noticed the flat tire at home the next morning when his wife was leaving on a road trip.

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THE 2004
ELECTIONS



MIKE
ZIMMERMAN



CATHLEEN
GALGIANI

JULY 4 SLAYING

D.A.: Police arrested the wrong man



By Mike De La Cruz
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An 18-year-old Merced man who had been charged with a July 4 murder at a local liquor store has been cleared.

Keith Martin Spencer was arrested three days after someone shot Merced resident Jaime Maldonado, 24, to death in front of California Liquor And Grocery Store, 112 R St.

Chief Deputy Public Defender Michael Pro, Spencer's attorney, said the district attorney's office asked that the charges be dropped earlier this week during a preliminary hearing in Merced County Superior Court.

Deputy District Attorney David Elgin said it was simply a case of having the wrong man.

The shooting took place after Maldonado stopped in the parking lot of the South Merced store to use a pay phone to call his mother and sister.

He was headed back to his mother's car, where a friend sat waiting for him, when a man in a car parked nearby approached him, asked where he was from, then opened fire.

Pro said investigations showed Spencer was at a barbecue and watching fireworks with friends at the time of the shooting.

Spencer was arrested July 7, but his attorney said a month later, the prosecution had enough doubts not to object to Spencer's release. Pro praised police Detective Harry Markarian, who investigated the case, and Elgin for keeping open minds.

Reporter Mike De La Cruz can be reached at 385-2474 or mdelacruz@mercedsun-star.com.

QUICK TAKE

News outside of Merced County

CLUES: An infantry commander in Iraq says it's likely that the missing tons of high explosives were trucked out of the country before the invasion.

See page A3

INCAPACITATED: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat collapses and doctors are summoned to help the 75-year-old leader as his health worsens.

See page A7

HOME STRETCH: Bush and Kerry stay on message and stay in swing states as their campaigns run in the final sprint to Election Day.

See page A6

SECOND LOOK: A human fossil found in Indonesia may hold new clues about the evolution of humans, scientists say.

See page A2



TRANSPORTATION

Transit concerns sought from public

By Scott Pesznecker
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The Merced County Association of Governments is trying to find out who is being passed over by public transportation.

The association will hold three meetings early next month to discuss the county's unmet transit needs. The state defines an unmet need as a lack of service that hinders a "transportation disadvantaged" person's ability to maintain a minimum standard of living.

The state defines transportation disadvantaged people as those who don't drive — either because of youth, old age or disabilities — and low-income residents.

Comments from the meetings, open to the

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WEATHER

Areas of morning fog; Clouds and sunshine. High 62; low 43.

CONTACT US

Have news for us? Contact the Sun-Star newsroom at 385-2457 to leave a tip or story idea.

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COMING TOMORROW

We'll take a look at international adoption and how it's brought joy to a family in Mariposa.



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