

MERCED SUN-STAR

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2005

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LOCAL B1



SPORTS C1

GLOBE TROTTERS

Livingston players go to Holland

We hardly ever
think about it, but
sweat is nature's
way to cool us

HEALTH D1

DISTRIBUTION CENTER

Anonymous salvo fired at Wal-Mart plan

Who is behind mailers
remains unknown

By David Chircop
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The first shot was fired in a battle against a proposed one-million-square-foot Wal-

Mart distribution center in Merced — but the shooter's identity remains hidden.

Days after the world's largest retailer announced plans to build in Merced, anonymously mailed postcards were sent to residents, urging them to call on elected officials to block construction of the center.

The yellow postcards, with

regular 37-cent stamps and typed labels, do not include a return address and do not disclose who paid for them.

The proposed Merced facility would be Wal-Mart's fourth California distribution center, initially employing about 600 people.

"Wal-Mart has promised 600 jobs, but are 600 jobs worth 600 truck trips per

day? More pollution? More noise? Lower property values?" the mass mailer asks.

The company has not yet announced the volume of trucks it plans to dock at the Merced center.

City officials have worked closely with a Wal-Mart contractor to secure a site for the

SEE WAL-MART, PAGE A4

Schwarzenegger says 'there's a chance' he can attend opening

Governor leaves UC door open

By Rosalio Ahumada
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Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger reportedly said he might be able to show up for the University of California, Merced's opening-day ceremony.

But a campus spokeswoman said they haven't heard anything new from the governor's office.

Schwarzenegger said during a radio interview that "there's a chance" he can juggle his schedule next week to attend the grand opening of the UC Merced campus Monday.

UC Merced Chancellor Carol Tomlinson-Keasey previously said a scheduling conflict would keep Schwarzenegger from Monday's Labor Day gala.

University officials said nothing has changed.

"The last thing we heard from the governor's office was he was not coming," said Patti Waid-Istas. "However, we welcome him if he can reschedule."

In an interview last week with Fresno radio station KMJ, the celebrity-governor blamed his booking agent for the oversight.

"Well, to be honest, you know, there's always a lot of scheduling going on and all this," Schwarzenegger said. "So I'm not aware of that I'm not showing up."

"But I know that there are always a lot of things going on at the same time. So there is no real reason for it, because I'm a huge believer in education, in higher education."

Schwarzenegger's plans for Labor Day have not yet been disclosed. The governor's press office would not comment Monday.

Former governors Gray Davis and George Deukmejian, Lt. Gov. Cruz Bustamante, Rep. Dennis Cardoza and several state lawmakers plan on attending the invitation-only campus event.

Modesto Bee Capitol Bureau reporter Eric Stern contributed to this report. Reporter Rosalio Ahumada can be reached at 385-2477 or rahumada@mercedsun-star.com.



"Well, to be honest, you know, there's always a lot of scheduling going on and all this. So I'm not aware of that I'm not showing up," Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger said on KMJ radio in Fresno last week.

More inside

LEAVING: Vice Chancellor Lindsay Desrochers, who has overseen campus construction, will be leaving UC Merced to return to the Portland area.

See page B1

Workdays will be reduced for employees in program MIGRANT EDUCATORS SEE \$1M SHORTFALL



SUN-STAR PHOTO BY JACK BLAND

Golden Valley High School senior Michelle Valencia talks about the courses she's taking with Secondary Counselor Assistant Lisette Fragoso with the Merced County Office of Education Migrant Education program. The governor's recent budget cuts took \$1.17 million from migrant education, a program that offers migrant students individual counseling and academic guidance.

By Doane Yawger
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Employees of the migrant education program will have their number of workdays reduced this year as the agency copes with a cut of more than \$1 million in funding.

Henry Valdez, chief human resources officer for the Merced County Office of Education, said 139 migrant education workers could see cuts between 10 and 25 days during the 2005-2006 school year, depending on their

positions.

Laurie Mitchell-Cole of Fresno, a labor relations representative with the California School Employees Association, decried the announced service cuts and said workers will suffer 12 percent wage cuts.

Ruben J. Patron, assistant superintendent for migrant education, said the department will continue to provide service and the reduction in days worked is the best plan to lessen the impact.

That's not how Gloria Romero of

Merced, a social service liaison with the migrant education program, sees it.

Romero said the cuts, which will take effect Nov. 1, could trim her work year from 210 days to 185 days.

"We're just losing all the way around here," Romero said. "That's a lot of money. Our insurance rates are going up this year and this swallows our little raises."

In line-item vetoes, as he approved

SEE SHORTFALL, PAGE A4

HURRICANE

Katrina slams into New Orleans

By Scott Gold and Ellen Barry
LOS ANGELES TIMES

NEW ORLEANS — Hurricane Katrina slammed this legendary Gulf Coast city Monday, flooding historic streets, damaging buildings such as the iconic Superdome and disrupting nearby oil production, before the weakened storm saturated areas across the South.

Estimates of the damage approached \$9 billion, and some estimates were much higher. More than 1 million people in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida remained

MORE INSIDE: Hurricane's toll on economy likely to be felt across the nation. See page C6

without electricity as federal officials rushed to bring supplies ranging from ice to clean water and food to the devastated regions.

"The damage has been great. We know it could have been worse," Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Blanco said at a news conference.

She warned the hundreds of thousands of people who fled the storm to

SEE HURRICANE, PAGE A4

QUICK TAKE

News outside of Merced County

TOUGH CHOICE: Sunni Arabs, most of whom reject Iraq's constitution, face a dilemma: Boycott the referendum and hand the Shiites a victory, or take part in a vote that they'll probably lose.

See page A3

TOUTING BENEFITS: President Bush visits Southern California to promote a Medicare prescription drug benefit that begins next year.

See page A5

Countdown to UC Merced

7 days until the start of classes at University of California's 10th campus

DOWNTOWN MERCED

Would-be hotel developer wants to hear from residents

By David Chircop
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Who says there's no free lunch?

Visionary hotel developer Wen Chang said he'll pick up the tab for a noon meeting at Main Street Cafe on Wednesday. The cafe is located at 460 W. Main St. in Merced.

Chang, founder and president of Atman Hospitality Group, Inc., of South San Francisco, is looking for comments from area residents on an environmentally friendly hotel he wants to build in downtown Merced.

"I'm trying to pull as much



CHANG

input from local people as possible and to incorporate that input to my architectural team's design," he said.

Chang's company is working under an exclusive negotiation with the city's redevelopment agency on a bid for an environmentally friendly downtown business-class hotel project across from City Hall on 18th Street.

SEE HOTEL, PAGE A4

WEATHER

A full day of sunshine today; clear tonight. High of 94; low of 56.

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

Got milk? The feds hope new dietary guidelines will up the ante and help boost calcium consumption.

