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CELEBRATING OUR **150th** ANNIVERSARY

The Sacramento Bee

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2007 **

www.sacbee.com

FINAL EDITION 50 CENTS

Big pot operation busted in Elk Grove

Plants limited to 2nd floor of homes to boost secrecy.

By Ryan Lillis and Sandy Louey
BEE STAFF WRITERS

Elk Grove police uncovered another network of marijuana-growing houses dotting the city's suburban neighborhoods Wednesday, and authorities said the targets of this operation had learned key camouflage lessons from the busts of dozens of others over the past year.

As police raided 21 homes and confiscated more than 6,100 plants, \$200,000 in cash, 10 vehicles and sophisticated growing equipment, investigators were struck by the amount of effort that had gone toward disguising the operations.

Many of the houses had furnished living rooms and manicured lawns, and some neighbors told police they had spoken with the people living in the homes.

In one home on Marina Cove Circle, a shrine to Buddha hung on the wall next to a massive fish tank holding more than a dozen goldfish. Out front, the rose bushes had recently been pruned.

Upstairs, police said, they found 319 marijuana plants.

Authorities said the suspects behind the large operation busted last year counted on anonymity in the suburbs, rarely showing their faces and letting their lawns go dry. In the end, authorities said, that kind of behavior only fueled curiosity by their neighbors, many of whom tipped off police.

► RAIDS, back page, A14

Hefty pay hikes for CSU chiefs

Top administrators to get nearly 12 percent raises.

By Larry Gordon
LOS ANGELES TIMES

Despite protests from faculty members, students and state officials, trustees of the California State University on Wednesday awarded pay increases to 26 top administrators and campus presidents that averaged nearly 12 percent and in some cases amounted to raises of more than \$44,000 a year.

Trustees, voting 14-2, said the raises were needed to help the 23-campus system recruit and keep talented administrators in a competitive national market. They contend the new salaries still will be substantially below those at rival schools, even though system Chancellor Charles B. Reed will be paid \$421,500 and campus presidents will average about \$292,000, plus annual housing allowances worth as much as \$60,000 and other perks.

California State University, Sacramento, President Alexander Gonzalez will earn \$295,000 yearly, an 11.2 percent increase.

Lt. Gov. John Garamendi, who is an

► CSU, Page A11

Murder witnesses' troubled pasts



Teresa Lara comforts her daughter, Monique Dela Cruz, whose infant son was killed Friday afternoon. The women appeared at a sheriff's news conference Wednesday.

They lived at house where pair were slain

By Christina Jewett, Dorothy Korber and Chelsea Phua
BEE STAFF WRITERS

The two occupants of the house where Sean Aquitania and his baby were gunned down Friday are no strangers to police, The Bee has learned.

One, already on probation for drug possession, was picked up earlier this year with a quarter-pound of marijuana in his car, court records show. The other was arrested 13 hours after the killings on suspicion of possessing a loaded, stolen gun, according to jail records.

The Bee is not naming the two men because they are eyewitnesses in the brutal crime that left the 21-year-old Aquitania and his infant son dead.

The men are not suspects in the case, Sacramento County sheriff's investiga-



Sean Aquitania and Monique Dela Cruz pose with their son, Sean Jr. Aquitania and the 7-month-old were shot to death Friday.

tors said, and the stolen gun was not involved in the double homicide.

Their rented home on Country Greens Court in southeast Sacramento County was the target of a drug-motivated home invasion robbery at 2 p.m. Friday, according to police.

Aquitania, arriving to pay a social visit, was forced at gunpoint into the house by two assailants, homicide Detective Dan Cabral said Wednesday.

Seven-month-old Sean Aquitania Jr. stayed in his father's car, asleep in his infant seat. The assailants killed Aquitania inside the house, Cabral said, and heartlessly shot the baby in the head.

"This is a community tragedy," said the detective. "These guys crossed the line when they touched the baby."

► BABY, back page, A14

Bipartisan bid to lengthen troop leaves falls short

Senate Republicans reject bill, which needed 60 votes to pass.

By Shailagh Murray and Jonathan Weisman
WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON - Senate Republicans on Wednesday rejected a bipartisan proposal to lengthen the home leaves of U.S. troops fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, derailing a measure

that war opponents viewed as one of the best chances to force President Bush to accelerate a redeployment of forces.

The proposal, sponsored by Sens. James Webb, D-Va., and Chuck Hagel, R-Neb., failed on a 56-44 vote, with 60 votes needed for passage - a tally that was virtually identical to a previous vote in July.

A last-minute campaign by the Defense Department and the White House to kill the measure won over Sen. John Warner, R-Va., an influ-

ential voice on defense policy who had voted with Webb and Hagel in July.

The defection of Warner, who said he decided the consequences would be disastrous, deflated any momentum that had been building and effectively ensured the legislation's demise.

Of the 56 senators voting to advance the measure, 49 were Democrats, six were Republicans, as well as Vermont Independent Bernard Sanders. Voting against it were 43 Republicans and

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INSIDE

The shooting involving private guards in Baghdad reveals gaps in the laws applying to such contractors.

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Why is the California Legislature holding a special session on health care? What do the Democrats want? What are the Republicans proposing? Here are some of the answers on this thorny topic. | A3

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CHP courage
California Highway Patrolman Mike Rimmel lost his legs in an accident on Highway 49 near Sonora in January 2006. But Rimmel did not lose his will to return to work on full-fledged patrol duty. | B1

SPORTS
A fixture for S.F.
Nate Thurmond is not just a professional basketball legend in the Bay Area. His Big Nate's Barbeque has been open 17 years and before that he had a soul food restaurant for nine years on Fillmore Street in San Francisco. | C1

BUSINESS
Hope on horizon
Sacramento's real estate downturn has a good chance of hitting bottom in 2008, business analysts say. | D1

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