



**Consultant: Insurance should be cheaper**  
FRONT | P12



**Lebanon bombing kills 7** FRONT | P10

**Dale Jr. to drive No. 88 for new sponsor**



SPORTS | P2

# Charlotte Sun



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## School district plans to reassess capital priorities

By **JASON WITZ**  
STAFF WRITER

Plan B never had a good ring to it, and plan C was even tougher to swallow. But Charlotte County Public Schools will have to reassess its priorities following public opposition to the district's half-cent sales tax proposal. "It's going to change a lot of things," said School Board Vice Chairman Lee Swift. "Quite frankly, it's going to create inequality

in our schools." Prior to Tuesday's election, school officials devised two options to fund capital projects in the event the referendum failed. School Board Chairwoman Andrea Messina said the plans would either prioritize certain projects, or spread the funds equally and extend all completion timetables. Either way, the projects will take longer. Board members will have a workshop Tuesday

to discuss the options. In the meantime, Swift said reconstruction projects like Lemon Bay High School will now take at least 10 years to complete. The district had already allocated \$8.1 million this year for construction and remodeling of the aging school. Swift said extending projects like LBHS will increase the estimate of \$90 million as a result of any construction cost fluctuations

and ongoing maintenance. "It's not the best way to do it," he said. The levy was expected to generate more than \$270 million during its 20 years. School officials planned to use the revenue to fund security and technology upgrades, along with renovation of facilities not associated with hurricane recovery. But only 18,846 of the county's 111,375 registered voters participated in the

special election, which cost the district \$106,930. Overall, 5,769 residents voted yes, while 13,004 opposed the increase. Seventy-three votes didn't count because the individuals forgot to press the "vote" button following their selection. School officials watched in disbelief as the gap of yes/no votes widened. "I don't think it's about the school system," said Lemon

Bay High School Principal Dan Jeffers, as he waited for the final results Tuesday. "It's about (residents) not wanting another tax." Messina said she is ready to move forward and create the best plan for students. "We wish it had been different, but it's not," she said. "We are still going to do our job." You can e-mail Jason Witz at [jwitz@sun-herald.com](mailto:jwitz@sun-herald.com).



SUN PHOTOS BY SARAH COWARD, [scoward@sun-herald.com](mailto:scoward@sun-herald.com)

"I want the troops to be treated better than the Vietnam troops," says former Army Nurse Irma Nemetz Wednesday while sewing "cool ties" for troops in Iraq. Nemetz's husband served two tours of duty in the Vietnam War. **BELOW LEFT:** A cool tie filled with water-absorbing crystals to cool the necks of troops stationed in hot, dry Iraq.



### With these hands

## Stitching a connection: Store wants to help cool off U.S. soldiers in Iraq

By **GARRY OVERBEY**  
DEPUTY CHARLOTTE EDITOR  
Volunteers at a local sewing store are trying to show their appreciation to American soldiers one stitch at a time. A Stitch Connection Inc. in Port Charlotte is trying to put together 1,000 items that soldiers serving in Iraq can use to cool off. "It just feels good to give back," said volunteer Maureen Replinger, whose son, Richard Replinger III, served in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Store owner Carol Vealey-Ellis

said the store's clientele, whom she calls "an extended family," were happy to help. "There isn't someone who hasn't been affected in some way by what's going on over there," she said. The volunteers Wednesday were making pouches filled with cooling crystals soldiers can wear in the field — "cool ties" and "helmet kisses." Along with each item, soldiers will get a note of support from volunteers.

STORE | P5

## Rather files suit against CBS

By **SAMUEL MAULL**  
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

NEW YORK — Dan Rather filed a \$70 million lawsuit against CBS and his former bosses Wednesday, claiming they made him a "scapegoat" for a discredited story about President Bush's military service during the Vietnam War. The 75-year-old Rather, whose final months were clouded by controversy over the story, said the actions of the defendants damaged his reputation and cost him significant financial loss.



RATHER

The lawsuit, filed in state Supreme Court in Manhattan, claims the network intentionally botched the aftermath of the story about Bush's time in the Texas Air National Guard and had Rather take the fall to "pacify" the White House. He was removed from his job at "CBS Evening News" in March 2005. Besides CBS Corp., the suit names former CBS parent company Viacom Inc., CBS President and CEO Leslie Moonves, Viacom chairman Sumner Redstone, and Andrew Heyward, former president of CBS News. The suit seeks \$20 million in compensatory damages and \$50 million in punitive damages. "These complaints are old news, and this lawsuit is without merit," said CBS spokesman Dana McClintock. Viacom had no comment.

Rather narrated a September 2004 report saying that Bush had disobeyed orders and shirked some of his duties during his National Guard service and that a commander felt pressured to sugarcoat Bush's record. In his lawsuit, Rather maintains that the story was true, but that if any aspect of the broadcast wasn't accurate, he was not responsible for the errors. The story relied on four documents, supposedly written by Bush's commander in the Texas Air National Guard, the late Lt.

RATHER | P4

## Iraqi PM disputes Blackwater's version of shooting

By **ROBERT H. REID**  
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

BAGHDAD — Iraq's prime minister Wednesday disputed Blackwater USA's version of a weekend shooting that left at least 11 people dead, saying he cannot tolerate "the killing of our citizens in cold blood." Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki

suggested that the U.S. Embassy should find another company to protect its diplomats. Blackwater, which provides security for American diplomats and other civilian officials in Iraq, insisted its contractors were responding to gunfire from insurgents. But more witnesses came

forward saying they saw Blackwater security guards firing at civilians in the Mansour district of western Baghdad on Sunday. Two witnesses recalled hearing an explosion before the gunfire, suggesting a bomb may have targeted the American convoy, prompting the guards to start shooting.

American and Iraqi officials announced they would form a joint committee to try to reconcile widely differing versions of Sunday's incident. Conflicting accounts were circulating among Iraqi officials themselves. Land travel by U.S. diplomats

DISPUTES | P5

High 87 Low 74  
A.m. and p.m. clouds and storms. Chance of rain 60 percent.  
Daily Edition 50¢  
7 05252 00025 8

**INDEX**  
Obituaries .....Our Town 5  
Crossword .....Our Town 12  
Horoscope .....Our Town 12  
Dear Abby .....Our Town 13  
Viewpoint .....Our Town 14  
Nation .....Front 2-3,7-9,12  
State .....Front 2,12  
Health .....Front 8,11  
World .....Front 8-10,13-14  
Lottery .....Sports 2

**In today's Sports**  
  
Lottery box now in the Sports section  
SPORTS | P2

**In today's Our Town**  
■ Pen pals meet after more than 40 years. . . . . Page 1  
■ Florida "Crackers" to be celebrated at gala Friday. Page 1  
■ Punta Gorda adopts new tax rate without protest . . . . Page 6  
■ Saluting Our Veterans . Page 9  
■ Myakka Pines developer holds neighborhood meeting. . . . . Page 1  
■ Police Beat. . . . . Page 3

**CHARLIE SAYS ...**  
  
I wonder if I could get one of those "cool ties" to help me chill out in the swamp.