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THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

FRIDAY, JULY 16, 2010

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SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA

Gulf oil leak plugged — for now

85 days, up to 184 million gallons later, BP cap works, but it's not a permanent fix

PRESS DEMOCRAT NEWS SERVICES

After 85 days, 16 hours and about 25 minutes, the oil has stopped.

With up to 184 million gallons of oil spilled into the Gulf of Mexico and 572 miles of Gulf Coast beaches tainted, BP on Thursday gained hopeful control over one of America's big-

gest environmental catastrophes Thursday.

The oil stopped flowing at 3:25 p.m. EDT when the last of three valves in a 75-ton cap over the runaway oil well was slowly throttled shut in a temporary fix.

The capped well may be fleeting if its pipes below the ocean floor prove too damaged to handle a full seal over the long term.

But news that the gushing oil had stopped at least temporarily left a battered region — and officials from BP to the White

House — suspended between hope and a knowledge that hope may be premature.

"As you can imagine, it felt very good not to see any oil going into the Gulf of Mexico," said BP Senior Vice President Kent Wells, who announced the closure at an afternoon conference. "What I'm trying to do is maintain my emotions. Remember, this is the start of our test."

George Barisich, president of the United Commercial Fishermen's Association, said Thursday was the best day Southeast

Louisiana has had since the well started leaking, but he said he's not completely convinced this is the end.

"We always have to be guarded in a situation like this," he said. "Just look at what happened with all the other things."

In Washington, President Barack Obama called the seal from the new cap "a positive sign."

But in an echo of Wells' warning, Obama added: "We're still in the testing phase."

TURN TO **OIL**, PAGE A5



This image taken from video shows oil has stopped flowing from the capped well.



For the latest, go to **pressdemocrat.com**

BP PLC

Offshore fishing community grieves after accident off Point Reyes; bodies of three Central Valley fishermen recovered, one still lost at sea

'Losing four good friends'



KENT PORTER / The Press Democrat

John Fagundes, right, and Robert Rodriguez, both of Oakdale, mourn their friends, who died in a boating accident off of Ten Mile Beach in Point Reyes. "It's one of the most horrible experiences I've ever put up with in my whole life," Rodriguez said.

By **BOB NORBERG**

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Flags flew at half-staff Thursday at Bodega Bay's Westside Campground, where a group of Central Valley fishermen were still in shock over the drowning deaths of four of their friends in the frigid waters off Point Reyes National Seashore.

"It's one of the most horrible experiences I've ever put up with in my whole life, losing four good friends at one time," said Robert Rodriguez of Oakdale.

Campground hostess Pat Forrest choked up thinking about the empty boat trailer and one of the victim's pickups she saw being taken away Thursday morning.

"It was really tough," Forrest said. "The campground is family."

The bodies of Henry Medrano, 62, of Riverbank, and Melvin Cox Jr., 67, of Imboden, Ark., were pulled from

the water off of 10 Mile Beach at Point Reyes after the boat in which they were fishing capsized.

The body of Ronald Fuentes, 65, of Riverbank, who was piloting the boat, was found washed ashore Thursday morning, the Fuentes family told the Modesto Bee.

Still missing is the owner of the 24-foot boat, Jack Taylor, 62, of Riverbank.

It was the second fatal boating accident off the North Coast in the past seven months. An elderly couple drowned Nov. 26 when their boat capsized off of Salmon Creek Beach while they were retrieving crab pots.

Only three North Coast boating accidents over the past 55 years have taken more lives.

The victims on Wednesday were all members of a close-knit group of 40 Central Valley men who call them-

TURN TO **FISHERMEN**, PAGE A5



Medrano family

Fishing buddies Ronald Fuentes, from left, Henry Medrano, Tim Looper, Jack Taylor and Robert Rodriguez. Fuentes, Medrano, Taylor and a fourth friend, Melvin Cox, were fishing Wednesday when their boat capsized.



For the latest, go to **pressdemocrat.com**

State issues \$350,000 fine for spills

Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District blamed for sewage release over 3 years

By **JULIE JOHNSON**

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

State water quality officials on Thursday fined the Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District \$350,000 for a series of spills that have poured 930,077 gallons of raw sewage into waterways in the past three years.

It is the biggest fine ever imposed in Sonoma County by the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board, a regional state agency that enforces water quality standards in all areas that drain into San Francisco Bay. In Sonoma County that includes Sonoma Valley and the Petaluma area.

The penalty comes in the wake of a leak on Monday that sent more than 20,000 gallons of raw sewage into Sonoma Creek near Glen Ellen, according to the Sonoma County Water Agency, which oversees the sanitation district.

Though not included in Thursday's action, this week's leak was further proof that the district wasn't moving fast enough to correct problems in the area's aging system, said Lila Tang, the regional board's wastewater division chief.

"The standard is no sewage spills," Tang said. "They're taking actions now and what we're say-

TURN TO **SPILLS**, PAGE A5

Strict rules OK'd for banks, Wall St.

By **JIM KUHNHENN**

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Congress on Thursday gave final approval to the stiffest restrictions on banks and Wall Street since the Depression, clamping down on lending practices and expanding consumer protections to prevent a repeat of the 2008 financial meltdown.

"We want to make sure this disaster never happens again," said Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev. "The solution has to start here."

A year in the making and 22 months after the collapse of Lehman Brothers triggered a worldwide panic in credit and other markets, the bill cleared its final hurdle with a 60-39 Senate vote. California's Democratic Sens. Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein both voted for it.

The legislation now goes to the White House for President Barack Obama's signature, expect-

TURN TO **BANKS**, PAGE A5



SANTA ROSA
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THE WEATHER, B6



TWO DECADES OF VINEMAN

Petaluma man prepares to race in this weekend's half-Ironman triathlon — for the 19th time / B1

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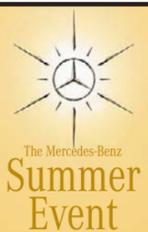
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