

The Augusta Chronicle

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THE SOUTH'S OLDEST NEWSPAPER — ESTABLISHED 1785

Monday, March 14, 2011

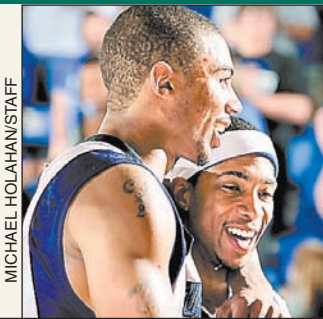
Daily Deal:

Enjoy fun and games inside or out. Details, 2A

1	Washington (23-10)
2	UNC (26-7)
3	LIU (27-5)
4	Duke (30-4)
5	Georgia (21-11)
6	Indiana St. (20-13)
7	Washington (23-10)
8	UNC (26-7)
9	LIU (27-5)
10	Georgia (21-11)
11	Duke (30-4)
12	Indiana St. (20-13)
13	Washington (23-10)
14	UNC (26-7)
15	LIU (27-5)
16	Georgia (21-11)
17	Duke (30-4)
18	Indiana St. (20-13)

NCAA bracket:

Make your picks and track them through the tournament. Sports, 4C



MICHAEL HOLAHAN/STAFF

Jaguars stay alive:

Augusta State's men's basketball team to play for regional title. Sports, 1C

ECONOMY

Georgia showing signs of recovery

Tax numbers give reasons for hope

By Errin Haines and Russ Bynum
Associated Press

SAVANNAH, Ga. — Hotels are hiring desk clerks and housekeepers in anticipation of a spring tourist boom in Savannah, while even a rural Georgia city devastated by manufacturing losses is putting some people back to work as construction begins on a \$57 million private prison.

Yes, Georgia still lags behind most of the U.S. with a 10.4 percent unemployment rate and barely a trickle of new hiring to make up for 350,000 jobs lost since 2007. But economists said they see the state's economy slowly pulling itself from the grip of recession and predict more progress will be evident by the year's end.

"The overall trend, if you look clearly shows an economy that is recovering," said Jeffrey Humphreys, an economic forecaster at the University of Georgia. "By the end of the year, I think Georgia will be performing on par with the rest of the nation."

What looks promising? Last week, the state Department of Revenue reported that February tax collections rose 26 percent compared with the same month a year ago. Sales taxes were up, a sign Georgians are spending more. Corporate income taxes also increased, signaling that businesses are making more money. And it was the eighth straight month that state revenues increased.

Even more encouraging are

Please see **ECONOMY** on **PAGE 5A**

AUGUSTA METRO AREA

During the past 13 months, the Augusta metro area's unemployment rate has ranged from a high of 9.6 percent to a low of 8.3 percent.

MONTH	RATE
January 2010	9.6%
February	9.4%
March	8.8%
April	8.3%
May	8.6%
June	9.2%
July	9.4%
August	9.3%
September	8.9%
October	8.9%
November	9.1%
December	8.8%
January 2011	9.0%

MORE ON AUGUSTA

► Development projects in 2010 among signs of progress/5A

Another reactor unit suffers blast



GREGORY BULL/ASSOCIATED PRESS

An official scans a man for radiation at an emergency center in Koriyama. More than 180,000 people have evacuated the area near the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear complex, where two reactor units have had explosions.

Tsunami toll now feared to top 10,000

From Wire Reports

SENDAI, Japan — With a death toll expected to climb into the tens of thousands, more than a half-million people displaced and a nuclear crisis continuing to unfold, rescuers converged on Japan's devastated earthquake zone while workers in relatively unaffected areas struggled to return to offices and factories.

The second hydrogen explosion in three days rocked Japan's stricken Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant today, sending a massive column of smoke into the air and wounding six workers. It was not immediately clear how much — if any — radiation had been released.

The explosion at the plant's Unit 3, which authorities have been frantically trying to cool after a system failure in the wake of the tsunami, triggered an order for hundreds of people to stay indoors, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano said.

The reactor's inner containment vessel holding nuclear rods was intact, Edano said, allaying some fears of the risk to the environment and public.

The blast follows a similar explosion Saturday at the plant's Unit 1, which injured four workers and caused mass evacuations. TV footage of the building housing Unit 3 appeared to show similar damage to Saturday's blast, with outer walls shorn off, leaving only a skeletal frame.

More than 180,000 people have



KYODO NEWS/ASSOCIATED PRESS

A woman searches through the rubble of her home. Officials had confirmed about 1,800 deaths and said more than 1,700 were missing.

evacuated the area in recent days, and as many as 160 might have been exposed to radiation.

Several other nuclear installations were under close watch for potential problems.

Across a wide swath of earthquake-hit territory, hundreds of thousands of hungry survivors roused themselves from a third cold night spent huddled in darkened emergency centers, cut off from rescuers, aid and electricity. At least 1.4 million households had gone

Please see **JAPAN** on **PAGE 5A**

NO THREAT TO U.S.

WASHINGTON — Harmful levels of radioactivity are not expected in the United States from damaged reactors in Japan, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission said Sunday.

Weather conditions appear to have taken the small releases of radioactivity out to sea, but the distance between Japan and the U.S. means no damaging levels are expected, the NRC said.

— Associated Press

SUNSHINE WEEK

Records request issues persist

City lawyers still provide hefty bill

By Sylvia Cooper
Correspondent

If you want public information from the government in Augusta, your best bet is to go directly to department directors, because if the request falls into the hands of the city's lawyers you could pay through the nose.

The *Augusta Chronicle's* latest request to the Augusta Law Department to review original requests handled by the department and its initial responses during 2010 will cost \$138.80 — and that's just to look at them. The cost of copying the request and the department's response from each of the 157 files at 25 cents per page would add another \$100 or so.

Kenneth Bray, the department's staff attorney, said the requests and responses are kept — not

alphabetized — in a file with all supporting documents, some of which contain privileged information that would have to be blacked out. It was not an unexpected response.

The cost of a request in September to review 31 personnel files in preparation for a newspaper article on city employees with felony criminal records was estimated at \$372 by Bray, who initially said the request was so large he couldn't even estimate the charge. In addition, it would take eight days to prepare.

The newspaper reduced its request to nine files and paid \$97.35, but when they were made available, all identifying information except the name, department and past employment was blacked out.

These are only two examples of the difficulty of getting public information from the law department, which in response to other requests has withheld or redacted documents because of incorrect interpretations, or disregard, of the Open Records Law.

For example, in September *The Chronicle's* company president had to write an open records demand and attorney David Hudson had to threaten to sue in an effort to find out who represented the city in the settlement case of former city engineering director Teresa Smith. Hudson noted that Bray had written earlier that the city did not have any such documents or records. Bray also said, incorrectly, that state law prohibits the disclosure of settlement documents.

The newspaper's latest request was made as part of a survey to find out how government agencies and school boards in Richmond and Columbia counties handle open records requests, with the results to be published this week in observance of Sunshine Week.

The newspaper also made requests to eight Richmond County department heads for simple, clearly public information, such as commissioners' expenses and a list of recent street repairs. Four provided the information almost

Please see **RECORDS** on **PAGE 8A**

MORE ON SUNSHINE WEEK

► Response times for requests/8A
► Georgia has yet to prosecute for open records, meeting violations/3B

WEATHER



Partly sunny
High: 77 Low: 48
More weather on Page 8C

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INSIDE TODAY



RAINIER EHRHARDT/STAFF

Watney wins duel at Doral

DORAL, Fla. — Nick Watney poured in two key putts for par along the back nine, then hit two fearless shots on the 18th hole and finished with a birdie to win the PGA Tour's Cadillac Championship at Doral by two shots over Dustin Johnson. **SPORTS, 1C**

DEATHS

Mrs. Patricia Beckworth Thomson
The Rev. Mary June Brooks Aiken
Mr. Battie O. Buck II North Carolina
Mr. Jimmie Carr Thomson
Mr. Jack R. Chalker Gibson, Ga.
Mr. George W. Cross Augusta
Mr. Brandon Denard Washington, Ga.
Mr. Joseph E. Dyches Sr. Aiken
Mrs. Mary F. Ellis Lincoln, Ga.
Ms. Colette Garnett-Hatcher Appling
The Rev. J. Emory Lindsey Sandersville, Ga.
Mr. Robert L. Parrish Williston, S.C.
Mr. James R. Ross Aiken

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