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OFF THE LIST

Cy Breen celebrated his 100th birthday with his grandson's classmates, who helped him cross an item off his "bucket list." **Page B3**

SECTION B

SENIOR EDITOR/NEWS **JIM KELLY** (760) 778-4767 or localnews@thedesertsun.com

Council awards park contract

The \$6.3M project is being paid for by a grant, impact fees

By **Xochitl Peña**
The Desert Sun

COACHELLA — Construction on a more than \$6 million park in Coachella is set to begin later this month and be ready for play in

November.

The City Council on Wednesday approved 4-0 — Councilman Steve Hernandez was absent — a proposal awarding a \$6.3 million contract to Anaheim-based LH Engineering for phase 1 of Las Flores Park.

The park is planned for 19 acres near Van Buren Street and Avenue 48.

Phase 1 will consist of three soccer fields, a bathroom/concession building, basketball court, am-

phitheater, picnic area, walking trails, workout stations and playground equipment.

Most of the money for the park — \$5 million — is coming from a Prop. 84 park grant while the rest is from development impact fees.

"I think it's great this is happening. It's a great location for our community," said resident Rudy Gutierrez, president of CYSA Little League.

According to national bench-

marks, the city should have close to 200 acres for its approximately 40,000 residents.

With only 49 acres — or about 25 percent of that standard met — the city is grossly lacking in park space.

The lack of park space is evident to local athletic leagues that often have to fight for space at the parks.

"Our problem right now isn't going away, we can't turn away kids. I just think this is great," Gutierrez

said of the proposed park.

The city held various input gathering meetings to find out what amenities residents wanted for the park.

"I'm glad we are finally here at this point," said Mayor Pro Tem Emmanuel Martinez.

"I'm looking forward to construction being on time and on budget... and with no or minimal change orders."

A half-cent sales tax increase to **Please see PARK, B4**



Firefighters and Riverside County Sheriff's Department personnel are on the scene near portable classrooms at La Quinta High School on Wednesday. About 500 students had to be evacuated after a student reported seeing another student place a possible incendiary device in the area. PHOTOS BY CRYSTAL CHATHAM/THE DESERT SUN

Students evacuated after report of explosive device

Styrofoam-like container found around school's portable classrooms deemed nonexplosive

By **Nicole C. Brambila**
The Desert Sun

LA QUINTA — La Quinta High School officials evacuated about 500 students Wednesday after a student reported seeing another student place a possible incendiary device between two buildings on campus.

Authorities declined to be specific about what the item actually was, but they did say it was in a Styrofoam-like container and was deemed nonexplosive.

It was "safely removed from school grounds," officials said.

School administrators, nevertheless, said they were glad they took precautions to protect students and staff.

"It's not a false alarm because the law says you can't bring any weapon to school," said Jeff Kaye, security director at Desert

Please see SCHOOL, B4



La Quinta High School students return to class as Riverside County Sheriff's Department personnel remain on school grounds Wednesday. There was a report that a possible incendiary device had been placed near portable classrooms at the school. The item was nonexplosive and the area was reopened.

MORE ONLINE View a photo gallery from the evacuation at mydesert.com/photos.

Woman hit by garbage truck critically injured

By **Colin Atagi**
The Desert Sun

INDIO — A woman was critically injured Wednesday after she was hit by a Burrtec Waste & Recycling Services garbage truck in Indio.

The truck backed into her at 11:54 a.m. outside James Madison Elementary School, 80-845 Avenue 46, according to Indio police.

The collision apparently occurred in the middle of the roadway.

The driver pulled forward after noticing a "commotion" behind his truck, Indio police spokesman Ben Guitron said.

Paramedics took the woman to Desert Regional Medical Center in Palm Springs. She is expected to survive.

Police do not know why she was in the middle of the street when she was hit.

Guitron described her as middle-aged. He

did not know her name.

Authorities say she may live in the area and often walks around the neighborhood.

Burrtec Director of Community Affairs Valerie Ward wouldn't comment on the incident.

"It's still under investigation," she said Wednesday.

Guitron said: "The driver at this time is fine but obviously shaken up."

James Madison Principal David Karlquist told The Desert Sun he knows the woman, but did not want to give out her name without her family's permission.

The incident happened near the west side of the school.

None of the children or the school staff were affected.

"It happened during one of our recesses, but no student came running up to tell us if they saw anything," Karlquist said.

The garbage truck was conducting a routine pickup at the school when the woman was hit, Karlquist said.

He's worked for the school 21 years and didn't recall anything like this happening before.

But it was at least the third time since November 2006 that a Burrtec truck has struck a pedestrian in the Coachella Valley.

On March 17, 2008, a truck dragged a Desert Hot Springs woman 100 feet in the Desert Crest Country Club.

Adella Avilla, then 59, was treated for critical injuries at Arrowhead Regional Medical Center in Colton.

Prior to that on Nov. 7, 2006, Kara Kaltenbach was hit by a garbage truck in the 71-000 block of Desert Drive in Rancho Mirage. The 30-year-old La Quinta woman died at the scene.

Financial aid focus of CVEP contest

Students, schools can win money for filling out FAFSA

By **Debra Gruszecki**
The Desert Sun

The Coachella Valley Economic Partnership on Wednesday kicked off its second annual "Battle of the High Schools" competition to encourage high school seniors to complete applications for financial aid.

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) — a required step to qualify for a federal grant, loan or scholarship — has been viewed by first-time applicants as being so daunting that parents and students either shrug it off or refuse to take it on.

For many, that makes attending a college or university unattainable.

As part of its mission to develop a college-educated workforce for the future economy of the valley, CVEP plans to award more than \$10,000 in cash prizes and gift certificates to local high schools that achieve the highest completion rate for the FAFSA.

It will host FAFSA completion workshops valleywide on Feb. 22.

"It's unusual for an economic development organization to be this proactive," said Terry Green, vice president of CVEP's Workforce Excellence Program.

But with constant public college tuition hikes in California, a contest like this keeps the hope of higher education alive.

To raise money for the competition, CVEP is holding an event Friday at UC Riverside's Palm

Please see CVEP, B4

IF YOU GO

DRUMMING UP FUNDS

The "Battle of the High Schools" 2012 FAFSA Competition fundraising event will be held Friday at UCR Palm Desert Graduate Center.

■ **Time:** 4 to 7 p.m.

■ **Cost:** \$100 per ticket.

■ **What it includes:** Appetizers, wine and refreshments, along with live student performances.

■ **Information:** CVEP at (760) 340-1575 or www.cvep.com

MORE INSIDE

Headlines in recent weeks regarding changes in financial aid have created plenty of confusion. To help navigate this process, here's a look at what's behind the recent changes. **B7**

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CORRECTIONS

We correct errors of fact promptly and courteously. If you have a correction or clarification, please contact Senior Editor Jim Kelly at (760) 778-4767 or at jim.kelly@thedesertsun.com

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ROUNDUP

Los Angeles County

Man wounded when shot by deputy in Compton

COMPTON — A man who allegedly pointed a handgun at deputies investigating a stolen vehicle report in Compton on Wednesday was wounded in a deputy-involved shooting.

The shooting occurred about 8:15 a.m. in the 1400 block of North Pearl Avenue. A black handgun was recovered at the scene, said Deputy Lillian Peck of the Sheriff's Headquarters Bureau.

Orange County

Coach arrested for possessing cocaine

SANTA ANA — A football coach at Santa Margarita Catholic High School, already reeling from a marijuana-growing scandal involving two other coaches, was arrested for allegedly being under the influence and in possession of cocaine, an Orange County sheriff's spokesman said Wednesday.

Kevin Orton, 48, of Costa Mesa was jailed Saturday on suspicion of possession of a controlled substance and being under the influence of a controlled substance, said Jim Amormino of the Orange County Sheriff's Department.

Officials break ground on Grand Terrace project

ANAHEIM — A ceremonial groundbreaking was held Wednesday for an extensive renovation at Honda Center.

The multimillion-dollar Grand Terrace Project will include construction of the 15,000-square-foot Grand Terrace, an exclusive indoor-outdoor entertainment space, which will feature an 80-foot bar and upscale dining options.

San Diego County

Men plead not guilty to first-degree murder

VISTA — Two ex-cons accused in the fatal shooting of a 20-year-old

mother whose bullet-riddled body was found near the Lawrence Welk Resort pleaded not guilty to first-degree murder charges Wednesday.

Jeffrey Steven McCreary, 42, and Destin Lee Withers, 35, are charged in the death of Morayma Denise Rodriguez, the mother of an 11-month-old daughter.

Report: City libraries lack patrons staffing

SAN DIEGO — San Diego has more libraries than comparable cities, but less-than-average staffing levels and patronage, according to a report presented Wednesday to the City Council's Budget Committee.

The data, compiled by the city's independent budget analyst, established benchmarks that will be used to set spending amounts in future budgets.

The presentation also focused on San Diego's park system.

— City News Service

PARK

Continued from B1

pay for more parks was defeated in November by Coachella voters.

Mayor Eduardo Garcia said phase 1 of Las Flores Park and improvements to other city parks over the next year were already planned and were not dependent on the ballot measure passing.

Had the tax increase passed, though, he said that money would have jump-started the creation of a 40-acre park at Calhoun Street and Avenue 50 on vacant land owned by the city.

While City Council members are happy to get phase 1 of Las Flores Park started, most lamented about the contract not going to a local firm.

Per state law, a contract using public funds must go to the lowest responsible bidder.

"I think it's great this is happening. It's a great location for our community."

Rudy Gutierrez, president of CYSA Little League

Phase 2 of Las Flores Park is slated to include two soccer fields and two baseball diamonds and would be completed when more money is available.

The city has applied for another \$5 million in Prop. 84 funds from the California State Parks Office of Grants & Local Services to build the rest of the park. City officials should find out if the grant was approved sometime after April.

"We're keeping our fingers crossed. We're hoping that comes through," said Garcia.

SCHOOL

Continued from B1

Sands Unified School District. "Anytime you get a call, you have to take it seriously."

Wednesday's evacuation was the second at La Quinta High School in a year. It was largely met with a sigh from students.

"Everyone's saying, like, there was a bomb," said Alie Quintero, a senior. "I didn't believe it."

A number of parents did pull students out of school, although officials did not know exactly how many. José Cuevas was one of them. He picked up his granddaughters after his daughter's frantic call.

"My daughter worried, you know," he said.

Parents were notified of the evacuation through the school's Facebook and Twitter pages.

The report came about 10:30 a.m. when a male student told a teacher he saw another student hide a white, waxy, potentially explosive substance between portable buildings. Within minutes, students were hurried out and onto the football field.

"We decided our first priority was the safety of all our students," said Todd Biggert, assistant principal.

More than 3,000 students attend La Quinta High School, but only the area around the school's 38 portable buildings at the southwest corner of the campus at 79-255 Blackhawk Way was cordoned off.

A bomb-sniffing dog swept over doorways and trash bins behind yellow police tape. The all-clear was given over the school's loud speaker shortly after, but not before some students left thinking the last class of the day in the portables had been canceled.

Students didn't know what to make of the incident.

"I'm going home to do homework," said Javier Sanchez, a junior.

One student was being held for questioning Wednesday afternoon. Riverside County sheriff's deputies did not release his name or age.

Last year in February, officials evacuated the entire high school over fears a student, who carried flame-retardant gloves in his pocket, brought a fuel tank to school in a backpack. No explosives were found then.

"The last thing you want to do in a school is get everyone all jacked up," Kaye said. "If the students treat it with a sigh, then we were doing our job. We had our A game on."

Desert Sun reporter Brian Indrelunas contributed to this report.

CVEP

Continued from B1

Desert campus.

Last year, 47 percent of the valley's high school seniors completed the FAFSA.

CVEP, in turn, awarded more than 430 scholarships totaling \$1.6 million to 1,500 student applicants.

"That's an impressive number," CVEP chief executive Tom Flavin said.

This year, the FAFSA goal is 57 percent.

College of the Desert can win \$1,000, if it increases its FAFSA completion rate by 10 percent. Another \$1,000 will be awarded to the alternative high school with the highest number of submitted FAFSA forms.

Students who attend any one of seven FAFSA workshops on Feb. 22 will be eligible for a \$1,000 cash prize.

City officials and representatives for state lawmakers Wednesday shared anecdotes about the competition's success.

"I know kids who filled out the FAFSA, and landed a scholarship as a result," said Desert Hot Springs Councilwoman Jan Pye, and there's an instant payback.

"It's that look of joy on their faces."



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