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City going after rats in vacant house

■ **New Port Richey officials, hearing residents' pleas, will seek a court order to enter the house and exterminate rats.**

By RICHARD VERRIER
Times Staff Writer
NEW PORT RICHEY — Mayor Peter Altman reached under the table, pulled out a plastic bag and dumped it in the air so the audience could examine its furry contents. Altman was proudly displaying a dead rat his dog had snared — on the same day the city was to hear complaints about a house in a neighborhood thought to be infested with rats.

Altman said this from the jaws of my dog in the back yard," said Altman, who lives on Magnolia Way. "The timing was too good. I had to bring it in. If everybody catches a rat, there will be 16,000 lower rats in the city."
Altman's display brought a few chuckles and came at the City Council voted Tuesday night to seek a court order to enter a vacant house at 421 Van Horn St. Several residents have complained to the city about the house, which they say is a haven for rats.

The city's building official said that while the house needs repairs, he could find no evidence of rat infestation.
But after hearing an earful from several neighborhood residents Tuesday night, City Council members sided with the residents. They agreed that the house posed a health hazard and justified emergency action by the city.

"I'd like to see us pursue a way of getting into that house and exterminating the rats," said council member Ted Thomas. "I don't want this to be a major health disaster. I don't want this to be a public relations disaster."
In addition to repairing a hole in the eaves and plugging some open sewer lines, the city will also ask a judge for permission to enter the house and exterminate any rats.
The city has been unable to reach the owner of the house, Robert G. Flick, who is thought to live in Germany.

Please see RATS Page 3

Missing woman's clothes found

■ **A laundry bag found in an Odessa freezer case might be a clue to how a Hudson woman disappeared.**

By CHRISTOPHER GOFFARD
Times Staff Writer

ODESSA — It was an odd discovery: a bag of neatly folded clothes tucked in a convenience store's outdoor freezer case.

When store manager Paris St. Scleridoro made the find Saturday, she immediately realized the clothes might belong to Diane Augat, the 48-year-old woman who once frequented the store and has been missing since April 10.

The manager called the missing woman's sister, Deborah Cronin, who identified the clothes as belonging to Augat. "I knew they were her clothes," Cronin said Wednesday. "They were some of the ones I gave her."

The Sheriff's Office has booked the clothes into evidence and is investigating what role, if any, they play in the woman's disappearance. Along with a piece of Augat's right middle finger — found last week along U.S. 19 — they deepen the mystery of the case.

There's a lot of possibilities," Dull said. "I don't know if you would consider it a clue at this point. We just don't know."

Exactly where the clothes were placed in the case outside the Totally Convenient store at 1430 State Road 54 in Odessa — before or after the disappearance — remains unknown.

St. Scleridoro said she last checked the case three weeks before the discovery. Cronin said she recognized the clothes as having been in the Chesapeake Drive home.
Augat, who has a history of mental illness, had been staying with her sister on Cobblestone Drive in Hudson and was last seen at the Day Lift tavern on State Road 52.

Turtle lookouts



Vicki Howell does her part for Earth Day on Wednesday by rescuing a gopher turtle on a road at Pasco-Hernando Community College as fellow freshman Jessica Brown looks on. Both students play on the PHCC softball team.

Panel considers guaranteeing rent payments

By RICHARD VERRIER
Times Staff Writer

NEW PORT RICHEY — The Pasco County Committee of 100 might guarantee up to \$100,000 in rental payments to a Palm Harbor developer to meet what the group calls a post-up demand for industrial buildings.

RK Properties wants to build a 25,000-square-foot "spec" building in west Pasco County and has asked the committee to help offset the risk by guaranteeing its rental payments for one year. The company would have to pay back any money it borrows from the committee.

"I think it's got a lot of merit," said board member Lamar Roberts, president of First National Bank of Pasco. "I like it."

An economist at the University of Florida, however, called it a bad idea.

"I haven't heard of a program like that," said Dick Scoggins of the University of Florida's Bureau of Economic and Business Research. "There's a shortage of industrial space that there ought to be a lot of money incentives for the developers to build these facilities on their own."

The committee is reviewing the application and has made no decision.

RK is the first to apply for the guaranteed rent program, which the committee started last year to attract more industrial construction.

Pasco has the schools, roads and work force, but not the factory buildings to enter small to medium companies, said Tom Gola, the committee's industry recruiter.

Real estate developers often cannot get financing for such speculative buildings. And the county has been unable to interest groups with the big bucks, such as real estate investment trusts.

Committee chooses new name

Times Staff Writer

For some, the name "Pasco County Committee of 100" conjures up images of an exclusive club for businessmen.

For others, it's too vague. "People don't know what the Committee of 100 is," said Kathy Small, marketing chairwoman for the nonprofit group that promotes economic development in Pasco.

The committee's board of directors on Wednesday picked a new name: Pasco Economic Development Council.

The group wanted a name that was more consistent with similar groups statewide.

"It identifies more specifically what we do and where our focus is," committee vice president Dick Williams said.

The new name will be announced at the committee's banquet in late August and will take effect Oct. 1.

Changing the committee's letterhead, brochures and other materials will cost \$29,358.

"They don't want to touch any thing that's less than \$10,000," Gola said. "We're not a big enough market for those guys."

So Gola tried another approach. He contacted RK Properties about the guaranteed rent program.

RK, which is building two industrial facilities on Gona Highway, was

permeate Circuit Judge Lynn Trepert to keep prosecutors from introducing evidence of other crimes the couple is accused of committing both before and after the murders.

Prosecutors said a series of crimes began more than two weeks before Mandelisa Bailey, 34, and her caregiver, Alice Lee, 57, were found dead in Bailey's mobile home in the southwest Pasco community of Crystal Springs. On Nov. 6, 1995, prosecutors say, Linebaugh stole guns from his father's home in Jacksonville, Texas.

Linebaugh is accused of killing an 18-year-old woman and her caregiver.

Please see TRIAL Page 3

Defense blames suspect's girlfriend for killings

By IAN JAMES
Times Staff Writer

DADA CITY — When Melissa Harris went on trial last year in the murders of two women in southeast Pasco, her attorneys portrayed her as a victim of intimidation by her then-boyfriend.

They said Earl Linebaugh, covered Harris into going along with the crime — and that Linebaugh, not Harris, shot the women.

Candidate withdraws bid to be union president

By BETH GLENN
Times Staff Writer

One of two candidates for president of the Pasco school employees union has dropped out of the race, making Friday's planned runoff election unnecessary.

Lynn Webb, an adult education teacher at Moore McQueen Education Center, will become president of the United School Employees of Pasco on June 1. Frank Butler, the union's outgoing vice president, withdrew his

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TIMES DIGEST

Sheriff's technician to challenge Collins

Pasco County Commissioner Ed Collins has drawn another opponent for this fall's election. He is Republican Chris Hart, the fifth candidate to enter the District 4 race. Hart, 37, is from New Port Richey and works as a radio technician for the Sheriff's Office. PAGE 3



Hillsborough delays vote on water agreement

The historic water agreement among bay area counties and cities was put in jeopardy Wednesday when Hillsborough County commissioners postponed voting on the measure until next week because they hadn't seen some of the documents. The St. Petersburg City Council votes tonight. The city of New Port Richey approved the agreement unanimously Tuesday night. Others still to vote are Pasco and Pinellas counties and the city of Tampa. SECTION 8