

Los Angeles Times

PLENTY OF POWDER

The lines are shorter, but the adventure is still big at these accessible slopes.

TRAVEL



VISIONS OF SUGAR PLUMS

L.A. Ballet's new headliner Melissa Barak shows a little naughty and nice.

MAGAZINE



MODERN FILM MACHISMO

Hollywood's gone manly, but it's not all tough hunks and retro smoothies.

CALENDAR

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DESIGNATED AREAS HIGHER \$1.50

A TIMES INVESTIGATION

Common trailers in untrained or careless hands can become unguided missiles, hurtling toward the defenseless. Rules are rarely enforced.

HAULING DANGER, COURTING DISASTER



Allegheny County, Pa., Northern Regional Police

BLOWN APART: Two triplets and their father died when a wood-chipper, foreground, broke free from a truck and smashed into a minivan in Pennsylvania. The truck driver hadn't checked the hookup or used safety chains. He was going about 70 in a 45-mph zone.

By MYRON LEVIN and ALAN C. MILLER
Times Staff Writers

Richland Township, Pa. SPENCER MORRISON was a stickler for safety. The middle-school teacher had precious cargo to protect — his 4-year-old triplets, Ethan, Garret and Alaina. Only the best minivan and top-of-the-line car seats would do.

None of that mattered when a trailer — a 3-ton wood-chipper on wheels — broke loose from a truck and careened into oncoming traffic like an unguided missile on April 13, 2006.

It smashed into the minivan and “just blew the vehicle apart,” the local police chief, T. Robert Amann, recalled. Morrison, 37, and two of the triplets died instantly. Ethan suffered a fractured skull and other injuries but survived.

The truck driver, Bradley Demitras, hadn't checked to make sure the chipper was securely hitched to his vehicle. He also failed to connect the safety chains, which are supposed to keep a trailer



IN THE PATH: Spencer Morrison was 37; Alaina and Garret, on his lap, were 4. Ethan lived.

attached if the hookup fails. Demitras pleaded guilty to involuntary manslaughter and is serving nine to 18 months in jail.

Runaway trailers are a little-known but persistent cause of devastating crashes, deaths and injuries across the country.

The government does not keep nationwide statistics on accidents caused by trailer decouplings. But a Times review of news reports and court files identified about 540 such crashes since 2000. They resulted in at least 164 deaths and hundreds of injuries.

Because some accidents aren't reported by news media or captured in electronic archives, the numbers likely understate the frequency of such incidents.

Shortly before Demitras' sentencing this past May, a runaway trailer triggered a chain-reaction wreck on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge in Maryland that killed three people and snarled traffic for nearly eight hours.

[See Trailers, Page A34]

In Hollywood, the fade to black begins

By RACHEL ABRAMOWITZ, MARIA ELENA FERNANDEZ and MEG JAMES
Times Staff Writers

Like a rolling blackout, Hollywood is shutting down.

Fallout from Friday's collapse of negotiations for a new contract between writers and studios will in the weeks and months ahead leave audiences with dwindling entertainment choices.

If the five-week-long strike by the Writers Guild of America continues, it's also poised to affect the awards season, the annual ritual of self-congratulation and promotion that runs through the winter.

And in short order, both the television networks and the movie studios will begin to suffer fi-

CHANNEL ISLAND

Bleak midwinter: Reruns and cheapo fare will rule as if it were July. **Page A28**

nancial pain as the lack of original content prompts viewers to flee — with advertisers not far behind.

“It's a dangerous time for the industry,” said producer Richard Zanuck, who ran the studio at Fox for nearly a decade and whose current movie, “Yes Man,” starring Jim Carrey, has been a target of picketing. “That doesn't mean that the companies have to give away the store to keep things alive or just stay afloat, but I think it's just a very dangerous time.”

Both sides left the table Fri-

[See Strike, Page A28]

Inside Today's Times



CHARLIE NEIBERGALL Associated Press

IN IOWA: Oprah Winfrey lends her star power to Democrat Barack Obama at a pair of stops that drew thousands. Hillary Rodham Clinton also spent the day in the state. **Nation, A22**

Thunder + snow: thundersnow

The rare combination of heavy snow with thunder and lightning is possible as mountain temperatures dip into the low 20s and teens. **California, B3**

Weather: Breezy with a chance of showers. L.A. Downtown: 63/46. **Page B16**
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Inquiry begins into CIA tape destruction

The agency's inspector general and the Justice Department will investigate whether crimes were committed.

By JOSH MEYER
Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department and the CIA's Office of the Inspector General said Saturday that they had launched a joint inquiry into the CIA's controversial destruction of videotaped interrogations of two Al Qaeda suspects. The preliminary inquiry would be a first step in determining whether a full investigation and potential criminal charges were warranted.

The probe had been under discussion since shortly after CIA Director Michael V. Hayden disclosed Thursday that CIA officials had made the videotapes in 2002 and destroyed them three years later. The Justice Department has asked for an initial meeting with the CIA's legal staff and inspector general, John L. Helgeson, early this week.

“I welcome this inquiry, and the CIA will cooperate fully,” Hayden said Saturday in a statement. “I welcome it as an opportunity to address questions that have arisen over the destruction back in 2005 of videotapes.”

Hayden's disclosure, made in a letter to employees, has caused an uproar in Congress and among some human rights advocates and defense lawyers. Many have called for investigations,

charging that the agency lied about the tapes' existence and then destroyed them to cover up evidence of extremely harsh, possibly illegal interrogations.

One staffer on the Senate Judiciary Committee, speaking on condition of anonymity because the inquiry is ongoing, said the CIA's actions could amount to obstruction of justice and false testimony to Congress — both federal crimes — because the agency did not turn over requested interrogation tapes to the congressionally appointed Sept. 11 commission.

[See CIA, Page A33]

CIA has recruited Iranians to defect

The secret effort aims to undermine Tehran's nuclear program.

By GREG MILLER
Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON — The CIA launched a secret program in 2005 designed to degrade Iran's nuclear weapons program by persuading key officials to defect, an effort that has prompted a “handful” of significant departures, current and former U.S. intelligence officials familiar with the operation say.

The previously undisclosed program, which CIA officials dubbed “the Brain Drain,” is part of a major intelligence push against Iran ordered by the White House two years ago.

Intelligence gathered as part of that campaign provided much of the basis for a U.S. report released last week that concluded the Islamic Republic had halted its nuclear weapons work in 2003. Officials declined to say how much of that intelligence could be attributed to the CIA program to recruit defectors.

Although the CIA effort on defections has been aimed in part at gaining information about Tehran's nuclear capabilities, its goal has been to undermine Iran's emerging capabilities by plucking key scientists, military officers and other personnel from its nuclear roster.

Encouraging scientists and military officers to defect has been a hallmark of CIA efforts against an array of targets since the height of the Cold War. But officials said those programs did not generally seek to degrade the target's capabilities, suggesting that U.S. officials believe Iran's nuclear know-how is still thin enough that it can be depleted.

The program has had limited success. Officials said that fewer than six well-placed Iranians have defected, and that none has been in a position to provide comprehensive information on Tehran's nuclear program.

The CIA effort reflects the ur-

[See Defectors, Page A14]

Episcopal diocese in Calif. votes to secede

By REBECCA TROUNSON
Times Staff Writer

FRESNO — Central California's Diocese of San Joaquin on Saturday became the first in the nation to secede from the Episcopal Church, taking the historic, risky step as part of a years-long struggle within the U.S. church and global Anglican Communion over homosexuality and biblical authority.

Despite emotional last-minute appeals from opponents to reconsider or delay, delegates to San Joaquin's annual convention voted 173 to 22, far more than the two-thirds majority needed, for the key constitutional change to break the diocese's ties to the Episcopal Church.

The action could serve as an impetus for other dioceses around the country to leave the Episcopal Church and try to start a more conservative alternative church. It could also lead to more lawsuits over who controls millions of dollars worth of property.

The delegates formally accepted an invitation to align their small, largely rural diocese

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