

★ GALVESTON COUNTY ★ THE DAILY NEWS

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INSIDE
Special Houston Texans section



Get a sneak peek at the Houston Texans' new home, Reliant Stadium

KEMAH

Fire chief resigns over past sex abuse conviction

By ALMA RODDEN
The Daily News

David Dockens resigned as Kemah's fire chief this week after members of the water board and fire de-

partment learned that he was convicted of a sex crime against a 10-year-old girl. Dockens pled guilty to sexually assaulting the girl 15 years ago in Houston. He said his decision to resign from the elected position was personally difficult because his prior record had no bearing on his leadership abilities as fire chief. Dockens, 48, said he was the target of a vendetta and smear campaign. "Somebody's out to make

me look bad," he said. Members of Water Control and Improvement District No. 18, which funds the volunteer fire department, had for the past two weeks debated the subject and voiced fears that

Dockens' past could harm Kemah's tourism future. John C. Booth, president of the board, said during a recent board meeting that Dockens' past was "unacceptable."

See DNEF/A2

TODAY'S TOPIC

FRIENDSWOOD

Her day in court

Judge sets Jan. 21 date for Harris trial

By LAURA ELDER
The Daily News

A Jan. 21 trial date has been set for the case of Clara Harris, a Friendswood dentist who ran over her husband, David Harris, in a hotel parking lot after catching him and his on-time repairman at a romantic rendezvous. Harris, 44, whose once blond hair was lately dyed brunette, appeared in state District Judge Cecil G. Davies' court in Houston on Friday with attorneys and two, unidentified friends.

Wearing a smoky blue suit with her hair swept back with a bow, Clara Harris appeared calm and poised.

A grand jury next week will begin reviewing evidence in the case, Assistant District Attorney Mia Magnus said she expected an indictment by the end of September.

Harris, charged with murder, has called her 44-year-old husband July 24 death an accident. She's free on \$20,000 bond.

Police have called David Harris' death "an act of passion."

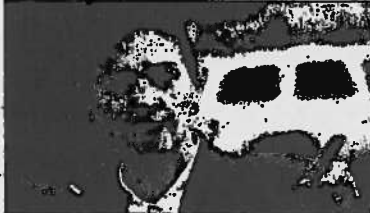
Clara Harris suspected her husband was having an affair and hired investigators on the day he was killed. But she didn't wait for private eyes to confirm her suspicions.

Instead, she went to the Nassau Bay Hilton and confronted her husband and Gail Bridges, 39, during their nighttime tryst. Bridges, a divorced mother of

See HARRIS/A2



The Associated Press
Clara Harris, right, who allegedly killed her husband by running him over three times with her Mercedes-Benz and leaving the car parked on top of him, leaves the Harris County Criminal Justice Center with attorney George Parham after a hearing in her case Friday in Houston.



The Associated Press
Clara Harris points as she leaves the Harris County Criminal Justice Center after a hearing in her case Friday in Houston. A Jan. 21 trial date was set.

TEXAS CITY

Union: Lockout is illegal

By MICHAEL CLEMENTS
The Daily News

The Texas City Metal Trades Council claims Sterling Chemicals illegally locked union workers out June 7 to prove to investors and potential owners that the company could operate without the workers.

The council filed an unfair labor practices complaint with the National Labor Relations Board against the company Monday. The complaint alleges that Rick Turner, head of the company's negotiating committee, told union negotiators and a federal mediator on June 18, 2002, that the lockout "was to prove to our investors, or future owners, that we could run the plant without the union."

Mark Kahl, Sterling's manager for investor relations and public affairs, said the allegation was "untrue and at no time has that statement been made."

Steven Elamson, business manager for the Texas City Metal Trades Council, said Turner did make the statement. He said he filed the charge because a lockout was meant to pressure union workers to accept an agreement.

"The lockout is not to prove to future owners and investors that you can run the plant without the union," he said.

Kahl said he agreed with that statement. He said that Sterling management wanted to reach a contract with the workers.

"The only reason for the lockout was the union's inability to accept the company's proposal," he said.

The union's contract expired May 1, 2002. Employees were locked out of their jobs June 7 after 80 percent of the union members voted to turn down the company's last proposal.

The proposal, as outlined in a Sterling press release at that time, called for pay increases of up to 2 percent for the first year of the new contract, 3 percent for the second and third years and a 3-percent raise across the board in the fourth year.

At that time Kahl said the company

See STERLING/A2

TEXAS CITY

Man shoots himself in head, dies during traffic stop

By MICHAEL CLEMENTS
The Daily News

Police were trying to determine why a man killed himself during a traffic stop Friday afternoon.

When Steven Wierzbicki, 41, of Houston was stopped by a state trooper, he pulled a pistol and shot himself in the head, according to police reports.

The shooting occurred at 2:50 p.m. on state Highway 146 just south of FM 517.

Wierzbicki was taken by ambulance to Memorial Medical Center where he was pronounced dead at 4:31 p.m.

Police Sgt. Thomas Lenoze said a Department of Public Safety trooper stopped

Wierzbicki in the southbound lane of state Highway 146 for speeding. As the trooper radioed the traffic stop into his dispatch office, he saw the man put a pistol to his head and fire.

"Lenoze said the trooper was shaken."

"He didn't even have a chance to call out to him," Lenoze said.

After the shot was fired, Wierzbicki's car rolled off the road into some tall grass. The driver's side door was open, and the window was shattered.

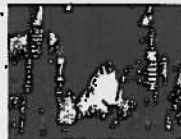
Investigators from Texas City studied the scene that was surrounded by yellow police tape Friday afternoon.

Why Wierzbicki killed himself was a mystery.

See SHOOTING/A2

OUR COUNTY

Good Ole Days



Annual festival kicks off second weekend with music, crafts and food. For details and highlights of other activities, see Weekend Events, B7.

TO OUR READERS

The Galveston County Daily News' main telephone line was out early Friday morning. Service was out the whole day. Callers to the newspaper got a busy signal.

Service was restored late Friday afternoon. Southwestern Bell Utilities said they replaced an underground cable.

The problem affected some, but not all, fax service. The newspaper continued to receive email.

Although service was restored Friday evening, the new line was to be monitored over the weekend. The Daily News apologizes for any inconvenience this may have caused.

Weather



Today's Forecast:

Mostly sunny

High: 90

Low: 80

Details: B12



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Wife who married husband of dreams living in a nightmare

DEAR ABBY In 1989, I married the man of my dreams. In 1995, he had an affair with our son's fourth-grade teacher. In 1997, he moved our family 4,500 miles away from our relatives and friends. Early in 2001, he met a woman on the Internet and began an affair. Late in 2001, he walked out, abandoning his family physically and financially.

Dear Abby

Abby, please answer these questions:

1. Do you think he will do the same to the woman he is with now?
2. Will he ever fully understand what he has done and what he has lost? (Our children are devastated.)
3. Do you think one day he will want to come home? (My friends think he will, but if he does, I wouldn't know what to do.)

Thank you for your advice. — **REBECCA IN SAIT LAKE CITY**

DEAR REBECCA:

1. Probably.
2. Probably not, since he appears to be without a conscience.
3. Only if his other relationships don't work out.

If your (former) husband should return, my advice would be to remain as emotionally and financially independent, because he has proved three times that you cannot depend on him.

DEAR ABBY: I was married less than two months ago. My husband, parents and I paid for everything. We had a tight budget, so my in-laws made plans for their own dresses and hair-styling. My friend "Misty" was in the wedding. She was paired to walk down the aisle with one of my husband's best friends, "Stu." Misty and Stu hit it off, and as a result, they are being married in the fall.

My husband and I have not been asked to be in their wedding. We are very disappointed since we were the matchmakers.

Misty has now asked to borrow the very expensive necklace that I bought and wore to my wedding dress. She claims her budget is tight and she can't afford one. The truth is, she's having a much larger wedding than mine, with all the extras I couldn't afford.

I want to tell Misty that she can't borrow my necklace, but I feel pressured to come up with a good excuse. What do you think, Abby? Do you think I'm being selfish? — **NEW BRIDE IN NEW ENGLAND**

DEAR NEW BRIDE: I understand you are hurt not to be in the wedding, but take the high road. Lead her your wedding. The chances of your wearing it again are slim, unless there's a drastic change in fashion trends. When you get it back, it will be twice blessed, and you will be a bigger person for having lost it.

DEAR ABBY: A year ago I had my name legally changed. I never liked the first name I was given, so I feel good about the fact that I did something about it.

My problem is people keep asking me why I changed my name, and I can't come up with a good response. I know why I did it, but I don't think I owe an explanation to anyone.

Abby, is there a simple answer for someone who asks without having to offer a long, drawn-out explanation? — **A FENCED BY ANY OTHER NAME**

DEAR BOBBE: Simply say, "I prefer this one. I see myself more of a Betty than a Laura" — then change the subject.

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

CHIEF

Continued from Page A1

ceptible" to a city marketing effort as a tourist destination.

Scott, along with Bernard McIntyre, vice president of the board, said that Dockens' past was a "horrible image" for the water district and the Kemah volunteer fire department.

Water Control and Improvement District No. 12 finds the volunteer fire department but does not fire or hire the fire chief.

"Mr. Dockens did a very good job, and I hate to see him leave," said Scott. "It was a terrific disappointment for this to come up."

Scott said the board did not know about Dockens' past until two weeks ago. He said the board was not carrying out a personal grudge against Dockens.

"There is no vendetta here,"

said Scott. "But how can the man that goes into schools and homes to be in charge of the fire department and hold public office with a felony record for sexually assaulting a 10-year-old child?"

Dockens is part of the Texas Department of Public Safety's sex offender registry.

After pleading guilty to sexually assaulting the girl, he was given 10 years probation. He said that probation ended in September 1997, but the entire 1987 incident sprang from a messy divorce.

Dockens' claim that he never had inappropriate contact with the girl.

He said he only pleaded guilty because Harris County prosecutors told him that if he did, they would offer him probation. He said he wanted to avoid the embarrassment of a trial.

"I was going to have a sign associated with me whether I pled guilty or not,"

Dockens said.

Dockens was elected fire chief from among the firefighters in the volunteer organization. He said his record came up on background checks and that Kemah city and police officials knew about his past.

Kemah Mayor Bill King said he found out about Dockens' criminal record three years ago when he was a city council member.

He said former fire chief Roger DeBek told the council about the charges and had Kemah police investigate the claims.

Kemah police thought the charges to be baseless, King said, and Dockens was admitted to the volunteer fire department.

King said Dockens has run the department well. He also believes Dockens is the target of a vendetta because of his commitment to making the volunteer organization more

active.

"Dockens was a hard-ass, no-nonsense guy and kicked a lot of guys out of the department for not showing up for meetings," said King. "I think a great disservice has been done to the community. We talk about justice in this community but what about forgiveness?"

Dockens has been a volunteer with the Kemah fire department for five years. He has served the last year as fire chief.

Dockens said he has worked hard to turn his life around and underwent counseling after pleading guilty to the sexual assault as a condition of his probation. He said one of his greatest regrets is pleading guilty to a crime he says he didn't commit.

"I wasn't innocent until proven guilty. I was guilty until proven innocent," he said.

HARRIS

Continued from Page A1

time, at one time was a Republican at David Harris' Clear Lake-area orthodontic practice.

Witnesses said Clara Harris ripped God Bridges' shirt off during a fight in the

hotel lobby, according to reports.

David Harris and some hotel employees tried to pull the women apart, according to reports.

Clara Harris then repeatedly struck her husband with her Mercedes-Benz, according to reports.

David Harris' 15-year-old daughter from a previous marriage was in the car with Clara Harris at the time.

One key piece of evidence could be videotape of the Clara Harris running over her husband, caught on camera by a private investi-

gator she hired to tail her husband.

Meanwhile, Clara Harris, who lives in Friendswood, fully blames Bridges, is spending time with her 8-year-old twin boys from her marriage to David Harris, said her attorney George Farham.

STIRLING

Continued from Page A1

also receive differences over the "upper classes" in the previous contract. The clause requires workers to drop all National Labor Relations Board complaints they have filed if their labor contract expires before the complaints are disposed of. The union wants this clause taken out of future contracts.

Union members said they rejected the proposal because it would have increased retirees' health insurance contributions from 15 percent of the premiums to 50 percent.

As the time of the vote, union leaders said the proposals might have provided some short-term incentives. But in the long run, the result would have been lower-paying jobs, possible safety problems and fewer benefits for retirees.

Since the lockout, union and company officials have been meeting, but little progress has been made toward a new contract.

"Unfortunately we haven't made any progress at all," Kahl said.

Still, Kahl said the company has managed quite well without the union workers. The company, which is in Chapter 11 bankruptcy, filed a reorganization plan last May. He said the company was

planning to restart its cyclonizable unit next February. The unit has been shut down almost two years because of soft market conditions. Markets have improved and that has relieved some of the financial pressure the company was under when negotiations began.

"We're not under the deadline to hurry up and finalize the Chapter 11," Kahl said.

Salmonella sickens 141 at Disney World

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — A salmonella outbreak at Walt Disney World sickened as many as 141 people, including visitors attending an athletic competition for organ-transplant recipients, health officials said Friday.

Eighteen cases were confirmed by laboratory tests. However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates 141 people who attended the U.S. Transplant Games in late June may have gotten sick.

The outbreak source was pinpointed, food samples served at six restaurants, epidemiologist Bill Tish said.



CHD GREENE/INDY/USA Today
Texas City Police Department Crime Investigator Larry Dwyer looks for evidence through a car. A Texas Department of Public Safety officer pulled over a man for speeding and the man shot himself in his car on the side of Highway 146 just south of FM 517 on Friday.

SUICIDE

Galveston (AP) — A 34-year-old man shot himself in his car on the side of Highway 146 just south of FM 517 on Friday.

The man, who was speeding, was pulled over by a Texas Department of Public Safety officer. He shot himself in his car.

"If everyone over 50 had colonoscopies checked, the cure rate could be 75%," Callus said.

— **TEXAS HEALTH CARE SOCIETY**

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CORRECTIONS

IA. Tommy Hanson of the Galveston County Sheriff's Office is perfect director of the Auto Crime Task Force. He was incorrectly identified in an editorial on Page A3 of Thursday's edition.

We make every effort to ensure the accuracy of the information we report, and it is our policy to correct errors promptly. Readers may bring mistakes to our attention by telephone at (409) 683-8200 or (800) 561-3611 or by fax at (409) 740-3421.

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