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ELI SETENICH

Wrinkles hamper 1st raisin fest

I only Richard Simmons had shown up. Maybe then it might have worked, and then again maybe not, concludes 'American Vineyard,' whose editor looked high and low for something nice to say about this summer's first California Raisin Country Festival, held in Fresno.

"Unfortunately," writes Dan Maloolin in the latest edition of the viticulture magazine, "except for a first-rate sand sculpture, I can't think of anything."

And that's not all. Let's not mince words: he goes on, unmincingly. "This event was a disaster. It was an embarrassment to this industry."

Sour grapes? Not exactly, he says; a bit judgmental perhaps, but more like constructive criticism.

The date, for example. Instead of early June, a time of school graduations throughout the raisin belt, hold it in the fall, he says, along with harvest time. Make it a three-day show. Don't charge admission. Concentrate on education.

And why such prominent billing for Budweiser? "Isn't this a family event?" the editor wonders. "Raisins, children's activities and beer? Not an ideal mix." A wine-tasting would be fine, but beer?

So it's back to the drawing board, raisin board, to iron out a new wrinkle, as it were.

Speaking of mincing words, whatever in the wacky world of salesmanship did happen to Mr. Simmons, the guy the California Raisin Marketing Board hired to peddle raisins? Took the \$100 grand and danced off with one of them, betcha.

DETOUR DE FARCE: In an otherwise glowing if fawning review of the Tower District restaurant Echo in the fancy foodie magazine 'Gourmet,' the reviewer hits a bit of a credibility gap when she notes that from the Fresno restaurant, Tallhouse is halfway to Yosemite. By way of Sequoia-Kings maybe. Just don't try it on an empty stomach.

COVER BOY: Turborecharged Farm Boy is the headline over the story in 'Excellence,' a slick and thick magazine produced by Porsche, that begins: "Milt Minter is as far from the conventional mold of today's pretty boy sports racer as you can get ... just another rough-hewn Fresno farm boy who graduated from racing's school of hard knocks."

The yarn tells of Minter's tour of driving with the late and legendary Vashek Polak, who once ordered him in his most guttural manner: "If you have room for bicycle, you pass them! I care not if you bring fender home in pocket, as long as you have checker flag in car."

Over a 40-plus-year career of cornering at breakneck speeds, Minter has brought home his share, both fenders in pocket and checker flag in car. At 66, he's still going like 166 on the straightaway.

LOOKS LIKE: Not one to be judgmental of politicians based on their looks, here's quick Dick Hassall, making an impartial try anyway.

Al Gore: "Looks like every P.E. teacher who looked at you and said, automatically, 'Take three more laps.'"

George W. Bush: "Looks like the guy in a bar who wants a fist fight when you admit, 'I could never have voted for Nixon, even though I'm a lifelong Republican.'"

Judgmental maybe, but right on the nose.

■ Eli Setenich is a Bee columnist. Contact him by e-mail at elio@fresnobee.com.

7 face sentencing in Fresno gang-rape case

But defense lawyers in the Mongolian Boys Society trial will ask for more time to fight the multiple convictions.

By GEORGE HOSTETTER

What started out seven months ago as one of the largest courtroom battles in Fresno County history could come to a close Tuesday when a Fresno County judge is scheduled to sentence seven men convicted in the Mongolian Boys Society gang-rape trial.

But the sentencing for some of the convicted rapists could be postponed until October or early November.

Lawyers for three of the seven said they will ask Superior Court Judge Gene Gomes on Tuesday for a postponement of

four to eight weeks so they can prepare motions seeking to modify or overturn some or all of the convictions. Given the complexity and seriousness of the motions, the lawyers said, they are optimistic Gomes will grant their requests for more time.

Nothing is a guarantee, but Judge Gomes has always been fair," said defense lawyer Steve Crawford, who represents Nhia Yang. "I don't anticipate any problems."

Colin Kooymjian, lawyer for Nua Mosa, said he wouldn't be surprised if lawyers for all seven men ask for continuance-

es. Cindy Hopper, lawyer for Sia John Ler, said she didn't receive the probation officer's sentencing recommendation for her client until Wednesday and needs time to review it.

The three defense lawyers said there were flaws in many of the guilty verdicts. The jury's inconsistency was one of the most serious, they said. How, they asked, could the jurors consider similar crimes in the same incident against multiple defendants, yet return not guilty verdicts for some defendants and guilty verdicts for others?

"It doesn't make sense," Hopper said. However, the three defense lawyers added that Gomes could deny all continuance requests and hand down the sentences Tuesday. Deputy District Attorney

Doug Haas declined to reveal his strategy, saying only that "we'll have to wait and see."

Seven of 10 defendants in the massive gang-rape trial were convicted Aug. 11 on more than 100 felony charges in the kidnapping, sexual assault and forced prostitution of several young girls. The 6-month-long trial and an immense investigation into the Mongolian Boys Society street gang began after the rape of three girls in April 1998 at a Fresno Motel 6.

The seven convicted rapists are Yang, Pao Mosa, Tue Xiong, Yona Yang, Pao Yang, Sia John Ler, Nhia Yang and Nua Mosa.

One defendant, Fong Mosa, was acquitted on all eight counts against him. His Please see SENTENCE, Page B2



Fresno firefighters Greg Crawford, left, and Kirk Wanless prepare to fight a fire Sunday at an abandoned house in Fresno.

2 Fresno fires called 'suspicious'

No one is hurt as abandoned house, recycling center burn.

By LISEL A. MAXWELL

Arson could be to blame for two fires Sunday afternoon — one that tore through an abandoned house downtown and another that charred part of a recycling business in southeast Fresno.

No one was injured in either blaze, but fire officials suspect both were started intentionally.

The first fire was reported just after 3:30 p.m. and, within minutes, city firefighters were dousing the two-story house from the ground and from atop a ladder.

Smoke billowed from the boarded-up building, searing the roof and the rear.

Fire officials didn't immediately know what sparked the blaze and were waiting

for firefighters to control the flames and smoke so arson investigators could start looking inside the house.

"We're probably going to find that it's arson or something suspicious," said Fresno City Fire Department Battalion Chief Bruce McDaniel. "There was no power to this house ... Buildings don't start burning on their own."

Firefighters have been to the house at the corner of Tuolumne and P streets previously.

"There have been small fires here before," McDaniel said. "But this is the biggest by far."

The second fire, also suspicious, did \$45,000 in damage at Fresno Unit 1, a Metal and Recycling on South Orange Avenue, Battalion Chief Timothy Henry said.

"There was no power to this house. ... Buildings don't start burning on their own."

— Fresno City Fire Department Battalion Chief Bruce McDaniel

The fire started in a pile of old computer parts outside the metal warehouse, Henry said.

"It's most likely arson," Henry said. "There was no source of ignition that could have started the fire naturally."

The blaze spread to the inside of the warehouse and burned some heavy machinery, old batteries, aluminum cans and computer parts.

Man held on molest charge

Canadian met a South Valley teen girl online.

By KERI GINS

THE FRESNO BEE

A Canadian man was arrested Saturday and charged with molesting a minor after he was found in a Lindsay hotel room with a 16-year-old Porterville girl he met through an Internet chat room.

Sean Erin Joseph Call, 28, of Victoria, British Columbia, is being held on \$50,000 bail at Bob Riley Detention Facility in Visalia.

In addition to molesting a minor, Call is charged with contributing to the delinquency of a minor, furnishing harmful matter to a minor for purposes of seduction, digital penetration of a minor and unlawful oral copulation. Authorities said the two met through an Internet chat room and had been corresponding through e-mail for some time.

They arranged to meet in Porterville late last week, and the girl told Tulare County Sheriff's deputies she planned to return to Canada with Call.

"She obviously wanted to get together with him," said Sgt. Ed Villalobos of the Tulare County Sheriff's Department. "Her folks got information from her computer that she was going to run away with him."

It is unclear when the two first met in Porterville, but the girl's parents reported her missing after she didn't return home from Porterville High School on Thursday.

Her parents later discovered e-mails to Call on her home computer and contacted authorities. The girl called home Friday to let her parents know she was OK, Villalobos said.

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A little bit of knowledge worth free trip to Tahiti

Madera teacher answers question from Regis.

By JIM DAVIS

THE FRESNO BEE

MADERA — It wasn't for a million dollars, but a cruise to Tahiti isn't bad.

Madera teacher Shari Garbett won the Tahiti trip last week when she answered a question in television personality Regis Philbin as part of his morning show, "Live with Regis."

The question: What state is Cindy Crawford from? Fortunately, Garbett knew Crawford is from Dekalb, Ill. That knowledge was worth a cruise for two to the South Pacific island valued at \$9,000.

"I had gone to that city and



got a little bit of my master's done there," said Garbett, who is from Illinois. "I had lived in that city for a summer."

She was awakened at 5 a.m. Tuesday by a phone call from show executives, who told her one of her postcards had been drawn, giving her the chance to win a trip.

"It was just amazing that it happened," Garbett said. Please see WIN, Page B2

SPIRITUAL BATTLEFIELD

Fresno man creates a computer game that puts right over might.

By JOHN G. TAYLOR

THE FRESNO BEE

Zest! Zest! Zest! No, it's not a soldier of fortune cauterizing a bloody stump so he can use his severed limb to brain an adversary. In other words, a traditional video game.

Instead, it's the sound of a sword vaporizing the menacing face of worldliness.

Backed by knockdown music that could be produced by any marquee band — but is actually the work of Christian alternative rock group New Jerusalem — the demons of vanity, self-righteousness and the occult square off against a single warrior wielding the Sword of the Spirit and bolstered by biblical Scrolls of Truth.

"Within the spiritual land of the human heart, an ongoing battle for the control of your mind is being waged."

So unfolds the message behind "Saints of Virtue,"



David Slayback, co-creator of the Christian computer game "Saints of Virtue," wanted to use his skills to create an alternative to violent video games.

A fast-selling, CD-ROM game targeted at Christians and co-created by Fresno resident David Slayback.

Players say "Saints" has some of the texture, complexity and scale of mass-market computer games such as "Quake" and "Mortal Combat."

Slayback, a former Sierra Online programmer, said "The game wasn't made to preach to people."

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