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Massage parlor owner to pay \$1 million in prostitution fines

THE SAINT LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Area charities are lining up, hoping to share in the \$1 million the man must pay in restitution for his failure to report prostitution.

A judge handed out a year and a day in prison Friday to the former owner of a massage parlor who profited from years of prostitution, saying that the man's \$1.25 million fine and restitution would hit him where it counts.

The man, Dennis Sonnenschein, 59, a former St. Louis area resident

who now lives in Colorado, had pleaded guilty to failing to inform authorities that prostitution was taking place at the Free Spirit Massage Parlor. Sonnenschein and another man owned the property, but others managed and operated it until it closed in 2000.

Dozens of women worked there over the years.

"He made a lot of money on the backs of women," U.S. District Judge Michael J. Reagan said. The other own-

er, James Bowen of Clarkson Valley, received two years' probation in May.

A few observers in the courtroom may have had a passing interest in Sonnenschein's sentence, but they were there to hear what the judge plans to do with \$1 million in restitution he promised to turn over to charity.

"I'd like to apologize to the city and residents of Brooklyn for any harm I may have caused them," Sonnenschein said when offered a chance

to address the judge. He said he was in the middle of a bitter divorce. "This is a terrible day in a series of terrible days."



Janice Sidwell and Rick Cantwell have been reunited with their kids, Damien, 2, and Angel, 9. (Michael Tercha | The Observer)

Election Day 2010

Democratic majority at risk



Election Day has special significance for the leaders of both parties. (Doug Mills | Associated Press)

By: Jim VandeHei and John Bresnahan

The Associated Press

Voters will do much more than decide control of Congress next week: They will determine whether the most powerful political figures in Washington are up, out or ousted from their leadership jobs. Nancy Pelosi, the most powerful House speaker in decades, is in serious danger of losing her job, either by Democrats' surrendering the majority or by emerging with a margin too thin to protect her. John Boehner is a cinch to replace her if Republicans win back power — but expectations are running so high, his job could be on the line if they fall short.

Harry Reid, a less formidable and less polished leader than Pelosi, could easily lose either his race — a 50-50 proposition at this point — or, less likely, his 10-seat majority. If the Senate falls, Mitch McConnell would become majority leader and inherit arguably the worst leadership job in

Washington: running the Senate with a meaningless margin and squeezed by a bunch of tea party senators hell-bent on stifling the establishment.

All of these dramas will play out in the hours and days after the results roll in. Publicly, all of the leaders — as well as other lawmakers watching their backs or contemplating a power grab — insist they spend little time gaming out the post-election scramble. Privately, everyone in leadership is, well, gaming out the post-election scramble.

Democratic sources tell us that if they lose the House, Pelosi may not only be out of a leadership job but also could start setting the stage for her retirement from Congress in 2011. If that happens, look for her to follow the Dennis Hastert model: Step down from leadership, quietly help with the transition of power and leave Congress in a way that causes minimal disruption for her caucus and her safe Democratic seat back home. The more intriguing question is: What if Democrats retain control with a very slim margin, say, less than a dozen seats?

This is the best possible result Democrats can hope for in this terrible political environment. Nearly a half-dozen moderate-to-conservative Democrats are on the record saying they would oppose her for speaker, and a dozen more have suggested they might do the same. This is a serious threat, given her unpopularity and centrality in so many campaigns. So Pelosi could be a goner either way. But — and this is a very important but — Pelosi is the most powerful Democrat in Congress, beloved by liberals, feared by critics and respected by many moderates for her political agility. She could easily harness the euphoria of a better-than-expected outcome to protect her job. And remember, women dominate the Democratic Party base, so is the party really going to toss aside the most powerful woman in the history of U.S. politics because a few Southern men don't like her?

Steny Hoyer doesn't clank when he walks — but it's hard to imagine any Democrat mustering up the courage to take him on for party leader if the majority falls. Hoyer offers the customary

denials that he even thinks about a post-Pelosi world, but behind the scenes his advisers are "planning for all eventualities," a top Democratic insider tells us.

If Pelosi resigns or retires, the most likely eventuality is that Hoyer jumps right into the minority leader race with a promise to bring together the liberal and moderate wings of the party. This is his core strength. Most moderate Democrats trust him because of his views on spending and national security. The old bulls like his authentic appreciation of the institutional ways of Congress and committee action. And liberals could probably live with him, albeit some quite reluctantly. Still, Hoyer needs to watch his left flank. There are rumblings that Democratic Caucus Chairman John Larson of Connecticut could make a play for party leader, arguing for fresh ideas and fresh leadership. Moderates get all the attention in tight races, but it's liberals who completely dominate the caucus, so a serious challenge is plausible.

See SENATE A-2

Children reunited with parents after years of separation

By: Liza Stein
Observer Reporter

PITTSFIELD, Ill. — Janice Sidwell stood and proudly told a Pike County circuit judge that her children were finally home. Two rows of methamphetamine users applauded. "Congratulations," Judge Michael Roseberry told her. "Good job."

Sidwell, 39, then grabbed a bag of Reese's Pieces from a candy bowl on the edge of the witness stand, a reward for her son and daughter.

Sidwell and the children's father had been caught twice for selling and using meth. They had served prison time and lost custody of the children.

And if the couple had remained in the criminal justice system, they would likely still be in prison today, in a cycle of drug abuse and incarceration that is a common path.

Instead, with the help of prosecutors and a judge, they ended up in Pike County's drug court, an administrative office

that has become, for all intents and purposes, a meth court, devoted to alternative responses to methamphetamine crimes.

Like most drug courts, meth court is in some ways a kinder, gentler approach. For non-violent offenders, the court offers a chance to avoid prison time and provides a much fuller safety net, directing addicts to drug counseling, mental health treatment, even parenting classes.

To address the long-lasting effects of methamphetamine and the tenacity of meth addiction, Pike County, about 270 miles southwest of Chicago, has gone a step further, with longer periods of supervision and exceptional levels of intervention. That not only helps users beat the habit, experts say, but also improves chances to reunify families such as Sidwell's.

Sidwell entered meth court in December 2004 and has been clean since, said Barb Allensworth, Pike County's chief probation officer. See METH A-4

Austrian man dies after causing disturbance on flight

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK -- Alexander Siess was on a recent flight from Mexico City to Paris when, authorities say, he became so unruly the pilot made an emergency landing at Kennedy International Airport.

Minutes after the 767 jet touched down, the 25-year-old Austrian was dead.

The circumstances of the little-noticed death last weekend — which may have involved alcohol and a violent struggle — remain murky.

An autopsy on Siess was inconclusive; toxicology and other tests were pending.

"We've been told it's an open investigation and we should wait for the outcome," said Gregor Csorsz, spokesman for the Austrian consulate in Manhattan, which notified Siess' parents about his death. Csorsz said Siess was a stu-

dent from St. Anton, but knew nothing else about his background.

Calls to the parents' home in Austria on Friday went unanswered. Another Austrian official in New York, Sigurd Pacher, said that the victim's brother traveled to the city, but was too upset to talk.

"He's still trying to cope with what happened," said Pacher, who did not give the brother's name.

Contacted this week, authorities and airline officials offered only fragmented accounts of what happened Oct. 11 on AeroMexico Flight 5.

Sometime after departing Mexico City, the pilot sought permission to land in New York "for the safety of the passengers and the plane," AeroMexico spokesman Mario Maraboto said.

whiskey, grew drunk and belligerent, Maraboto said. to his seat while

See FLIGHT A-3



An auction house worker holds a rare violin known as **The Hammer**, made in Cremona, Italy, in 1707 by famous musical instrument maker Antonio Stradivari. The instrument, made at the height of Stradivari's golden period, will be auctioned by Christie's New York on May 16 and is expected to fetch between \$1.5 to \$2 million. (Lefteris Pitarakis | Associated Press)

Teen pregnancy numbers continue to rise

Staff Reporter

"I always wanted kids," said Ashley Goetz, "but not at 16."

It was two weeks before her 16th birthday that Goetz got sick on a Ferris wheel, looked at the calendar, put two and two together and bought a home pregnancy test. Then, she went to the Health Department for confirmation.

But for three months after that, both Goetz and her boyfriend stayed in denial. She didn't tell her friends, her parents or her employer that she was pregnant.

"I didn't want to think about it," she said.

Eventually, she didn't have a choice. Other girls at Karns High School made fun of her when she was throwing up with morning sickness. Her coworkers started noticing her weight gain. Her mother wrote her a letter, asking point-blank if she was pregnant. When she admitted it, her father, deeply disappointed, didn't speak to her until after the baby was born.

The birth of Madeline Grace was relatively easy, Goetz said.

But what came after, as much as she loves her daughter, has been any



Eighteen year-old Ashley Goetz plays with her daughter, Madeline, in November. (Amy Burgess | The Observer)

thing but easy for Goetz. Long

These days, teens no longer make up the majority of unmarried mothers, as they did 30 years ago. Even though Illinois' teen pregnancy rate is 15th among states, the number of teen pregnancies statewide, as in most of the rest of the country, has steadily declined over the past decade. Last year, the Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention, looking at 2006 data, reported the first increase in the U.S. teen pregnancy rate in 15 years.

In Madison County, the numbers have fluctuated slightly from year to year. The year 2008 saw seven births to girls age 10-14, 173 to girls 15-17 (93 percent of whom were

See TEEN A-6



Hundreds of Afghan soldiers surrounded Kabul's main prison Sunday after rioting inmates seized control of much of the facility in an uprising that officials blamed on al Qaeda and Taliban militants. (Musadeq Sadeq | AP)

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Area ecological projects awarded grant money from state

By: Justin Smith
Observer reporter

Three area environmental projects are among recipients of Conservation 2000 Ecosystems grants from Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The programs and awards are:

American Bottoms Partnership; a \$17,810 grant to Southwestern Illinois RC & D Inc. for restoration of bluff ecosystems, including exotic species removal and brush control, on six or more natural areas in St. Clair, Monroe and Randolph counties.

Lower Kaskaskia River Partnership; a \$68,512 grant to Southwestern Illinois RC & D Inc. for development of a seven-county tracking

grant to The Nature Institute to recruit, organize and manage a network of volunteer land stewards in Madison, Jersey, Macoupin, Calhoun and Greene counties.

Big Rivers Partnership; an \$18,889

system that will be used to record and monitor conservation practices.

As a result of this grant, the area is going to attract more tourism and ecology specialists interested in working on preserving the local flora and fauna.