

# PENSACOLA News Journal

FRIDAY, MARCH 12, 2004



## Good times in Santa Rosa

Along the Blackwater River in historic downtown Milton can be found hours and hours of arts and entertainment. Along with the Riverwalk, Santa Rosa County has much more to offer for a good time.

LIFE, 1B



## PHS boys fall short in semis

The Pensacola High boys basketball team held off the No. 1 team in Florida on Friday in the Class 4A semifinals. But Winter Haven proved to be too much in overtime, beating the Tigers 57-54.

SPORTS, 1D

## Middle school parents talk sex

In response to a recent incident of oral sex on campus, Workman Middle School parents gathered Thursday night to discuss their children's sexual education — as well as their own.

LOCAL, 1C

## Women focus on donations

IMPACT 100 Pensacola Bay Area, the all-women philanthropic organization, formed committees Thursday to start the process that will decide which two local charities will receive more than \$115,000 each.

MONEY, 10C



## Tigers out of SEC tourney

Much to Coach Cliff Ellis' chagrin, the Auburn men's basketball team was ousted from the SEC tournament Thursday by Georgia.

SPORTS, 1D

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## Spend your weekend with dragons

WEEKENDER

# More guards, tourists hit the beach

## Precautions beefed up as spring break begins

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Beach safety crews are increasing their efforts as spring break heats up this weekend.

Escambia and Santa Rosa county schools let out for a weeklong fling after today, and out-of-state college students and families are beach-bound.

Spring break continues until the end of April, providing the first push of the tourist season that is the lifeblood of beach

businesses. The influx is good for business but can mean bad news for inexperienced swimmers visiting the area. Since April 2000, 21 people have drowned at 13 unguarded areas at Pensacola Beach.

This weekend on Pensacola Beach, more lifeguard towers will open, roving patrols will be out in force, and lifeguards at towers will interact with the public.



Ayres

"We're optimistic that our program will be much better than it's been," said Santa Rosa Island Authority member Don Ayres.

Indications are it will be a busy weekend. Most of Pensacola's 1,400 hotel rooms are booked for the next two weekends, said Sandy Johnston, Pensacola Beach Chamber of Commerce director. On Thursday, only one beach hotel had

more than a dozen rooms left, she said. That doesn't count the condominiums rented.

"We've had a lot of business for this early in the season," said Dawn Williams, an employee with Key Sailing on Pensacola Beach, which offers parasailing, Wave Runner, boat and kayak rentals.

Last weekend, the beach was packed, said beach public safety director Bob West.

See WATER SAFETY, 4A

## Weekend weather outlook

Partly cloudy skies are predicted through Sunday. Highs are expected to reach about 70 today, mid-60s on Saturday and mid-70s Sunday.

Today	Saturday	Sunday
<b>SAFE</b>	<b>CAUTION</b>	<b>CAUTION</b>
A low risk of rip currents is expected at the beach.	Moderate risk of rip currents by the afternoon.	Moderate risk, however, dangerous surf possible.

# Terror strikes Spanish railway

## Coordinated blasts kill 190

Knight Ridder

MADRID, Spain — More than 190 people were killed and at least another 1,200 injured when a series of terrorist bombs ripped through trains during the Spanish capital's morning rush hour Thursday. It was the bloodiest such attack in Spain's history.

Government officials quickly blamed the bombings, three days before national elections, on the Basque separatist group ETA, which has waged a bloody 40-year campaign for independence. A letter to an Arabic-language newspaper in London later claimed the attacks were carried out by the al-Qaida terrorist network but provided no evidence. The Abu Hafs al Masri Brigades have falsely claimed responsibility for past acts of terrorism.

The letter, which dubbed the explosions "Operation Death Trains," called the attacks "a way to settle old accounts with Spain, crusader and ally of America in its war against Islam."

Late Thursday, Spanish police reported finding a van with seven detonators, an Arabic tape and Quranic writing, and were investigating whether it was linked to the attacks.

"This pain will never leave Madrid," Mayor Alberto Ruiz Gallardon said.

The bombs were carried onto the trains in satchels and were believed to have been made from dynamite and explosives stolen from France three years ago.

Police said 10 bombs rocked the trains. Another three were detected and safely detonated by police.

The explosions struck the trains within minutes of one another, just as commuters — workers and students — were preparing to pile off the trains along the southern side of the city. Hardest hit was Atocha, the city's main station.

The number of dead and wounded was overwhelming. Doctors performed rail-side surgery, city buses were pressed into service as ambulances and makeshift morgues were set up.



Paul White/Associated Press

Firefighters carry a body on a stretcher after a bomb ripped through a passenger train Thursday in the Spanish capital of Madrid.

## Escambia School District grade improves after miscalculation

After a second look, the state determined the Escambia County School District earned a grade of "B" last year.

Escambia originally was graded a C. After appealing a miscalculation by the Florida Department of Education, the overall score increased 15 points.

"This is great news, worth cheering about," said Superintendent Jim Paul.

Last year was the first year counties were ranked on the same A through F scale that is used to grade schools. Unlike FCAT gains at individual schools, there are no monetary rewards or state sanctions tied to the county's grade. Grades are determined by measuring student achievement on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, the percent of students making learning gains and the progress of the lowest-performing students.

Santa Rosa County earned an A, said Superintendent John Rogers.

— Gina Pace@PensacolaNewsJournal.com

# Ex-nurse charged with drug fraud

## Scam supported 30-pill-a-day dependency, investigators believe

Sean Smith

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A 30-pill-a-day dependency fueled a former nurse's scheme to illegally obtain prescription drugs from area pharmacies, sheriff's officials said Thursday.

Lisa Florence Nicholson, 39, could face nearly 100 counts of obtaining a controlled substance by fraud, as well as impersonating a police officer during the commission of a felony, the Escambia County Sheriff's Office reported.

Nicholson of the 2000 block of Caswell Drive in Pensacola is being held without bond



Nicholson

at Escambia County Jail after investigator Wendy Powers arrested her at the Medical Center Clinic at West Florida Hospital.

Nicholson was convicted of similar charges in 2001 and 2002, and her license as a nurse was revoked, Powers said.

But Nicholson knew enough about the system to get the information she needed to continue her addiction to the painkiller

Lortab. Powers found a list of 40 names Nicholson could have been using to obtain drugs.

Nicholson worked at Advanced Electrolysis and had been stealing patient information, as well as doctors' Drug Enforcement Agency numbers to call in bogus prescriptions, Powers said.

"We have her on (pharmacy) video doing this as far back as 2002," said Powers, who began investigating complaints in January. "She has been doing this at pharmacies from Pensacola to Nine Mile Road, Cantonment and Perdido Key."

Lennon Land, pharmacist with the Medical Center Clinic at West Florida Hospital, said customers are required to show ID unless they have a release from the patient.

"We thought we were being secure. She had all the pertinent patient information and the doctor's (information)," Land said.

If she sensed suspicion, Nicholson would call pharmacists posing as an investigator, Powers said.

"She was very careful. If she sensed they suspected it was fraudulent, she wouldn't go," Powers said.

# Official: Radium settling in pipes

## Running water can help flush problem

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Escambia County Health Department officials say they now have evidence that radium can accumulate in area water pipes.

Recent testing at St. Paul Catholic School in Pensacola showed radium levels in the water lines diminished after the water pipes were flushed for a minute or more.

After high readings in two public schools, the health department took its own samples at a number of Pensacola locations. So far, St. Paul's was the only location where a high level of radium was found — in an outdoor spigot not used for drinking.

The school's drinking water is safe, said health department director John Lanza.

The department is investigating St. Paul's and other locations in the county to learn what might be causing radium to accumulate in some pipes.

The department's primary suspects are galvanized metal pipes, common drinking water additives like phosphorous and non-toxic drinking water pollutants such as iron and manganese.

## Test results

A high level of radium was detected at an outdoor water spigot at St. Paul's Catholic School, but the school's drinking water was deemed safe by the Escambia County Health Department.

The tests have come back safe for radium, but the department still is investigating what can cause the carcinogen to settle in water pipes.

Cook and Suter elementary students are still drinking bottled water pending further word from the Health Department.

See DRINKING WATER, 4A

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