



RANGERS TAKE COMMAND VS. CARDINALS Sports

Acclaimed pianist excited about Fresno concert Life



# The Fresno Bee

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## Fire inspection fees debated

New Fresno council member, city fire chief trade arguments.

By George Hostetter  
The Fresno Bee

Fresno City Council Member Clint Olivier says the city's fire-inspection program is broken.

The program is a drag on the budget and doesn't come close to collecting all of the fees that are supposed to keep it in the black, Olivier charges.

It may not be perfect, counters Fire Chief Joel Aranz, but the fire-inspection program still does an excellent job of saving lives and protecting property.

All the program needs in these tough budgetary times is a bit more money, Aranz

says.

A fight—one of the council's newest council members on one side, a powerful public-safety agency on the other—is brewing at City Hall and it could erupt early next month.

"On the council these days, we're fighting over \$20,000," Olivier said. "There's a shortfall of hundreds of thousands of dollars [in the fire-inspection program]. It's screaming out to be reformed."

That's overstating the situation, Aranz said.

The program "is not broken," Aranz said. "There are areas that need attention, such as

collections. We are taking care of that."

At the heart of this battle is the Fire Department's effort to raise the fees it charges for state-mandated safety inspections of everything from hospitals and jails to apartment complexes and barbershops.

There is a wide variety to the fees and the proposed increases. For example, a business in a small site would see its first-time inspection fee rise from the current \$44 to \$51. High-profile entities, such as hospitals, are inspected more often than small businesses.

The council was supposed to vote on the proposed increases last Thursday. But at the request of City Manager Mark Scott, the council postponed its decision until after a Nov. 3

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## Obama reboots housing efforts

But broader problems weigh down the sector.

By Kevin G. Hall  
Bee Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration on Monday rebooted a failing effort to help some homeowners refinance their homes, making it easier for some who owe more than their house is worth to get a new loan.

The new effort, however, stops far short of tackling broader problems weighing down the housing sector.

"If you meet certain requirements, you will have the chance to refinance at lower rates, which could save you hundreds of dollars a month, and thousands of dollars a year in mortgage payments," President Barack Obama said in Las Vegas as he unveiled the changes coming to the Home Affordable Refinance Program, launched two years ago to great fanfare.

Second, there will be lower closing costs, and certain refinancing fees will be eliminated — fees that can sometimes cancel out the benefit of refinancing altogether."

Independent economists say HARP has underwhelmed, but they generally supported the president's HARP 2.0 because it will boost borrower cash flows, thus freeing them to spend more in a sluggish economy.

"While HARP won't live up to the initial expectations of 4 [million] to 5 million in refinancings, the program will ultimately provide a meaningful boost to the broader economy as financially stressed households will benefit from much lower mortgage payments," said Mark Zandi, chief economist for forecaster Moody's Analytics.

HARP was supposed to be the simpler part of a two-pronged

See **HOUSING**, Page A7



President Obama said Monday, "These are important steps that will help more homeowners refinance at lower rates, save consumers money and help get folks spending again."

### MORE INSIDE

Who benefits?: A guide to the administration's mortgage plan. Page A7

## Avatars for the aged

UC Merced students developing technology to aid in medical care.



CRAIG KOHLRUSS/THE FRESNO BEE

University of California at Merced graduate student Carlo Camporesi is silhouetted on a large 3-D screen as he talks about how he can use it to have animated avatars shadow his own movements. The technology could help reach more patients with medical care at less cost.

By Heather Somerville  
The Fresno Bee

MERCED — In a dark room lit only by the razor-thin beams of infrared cameras, University of California at Merced graduate student Carlo Camporesi spends most days — and many nights — in the company of avatars.

This isn't the next big sci-fi movie in the making or the latest Nintendo Wii video game. Camporesi is part of a research team working to solve a very real problem — how to overcome an expected shortage of physical therapists who will work with aging baby boomers.

UC Merced received a \$75,000 grant through the UC system for five graduate students to begin creating a software program

this year that uses avatars to provide physical therapy to the elderly.

Professors say the project has the potential to improve the health of thousands of people. It offers a blueprint for future projects that college administrators hope will bolster UC Merced's reputation as a research institution and help it compete better for its share of the dwindling supply of federal research dollars.

There isn't much budget talk in the cramped room where Camporesi works, immersed in a world that teeters between fantasy and reality. Camporesi positions himself in front of a 3-D, floor-to-ceiling projection screen — researchers call it a "powerwall" — wearing sensors so the infrared cameras can track his every movement.

On the screen, an avatar stands in a virtual reality kitchen. Each time Camporesi moves, so does the avatar. He's training the avatars to mimic people so perfectly that, on a computer or TV screen, they could be mistaken as human.

Suddenly, the avatar's right hand bends at a precipitous angle. The sensor strapped to Camporesi's hand had fallen off.

Camporesi and fellow computer graphics and animation doctoral student David Huang chuckle. This is still a work in progress, they say.

But give them three to five years, and the students say they could have the next breakthrough in delivering health care through

See **AVATARS**, Page A5

## NASA sting terrifies woman, 74, selling moon speck

By Thomas Watkins  
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The elaborate mission to recover a moon rock led NASA agents to one of the most down-to-earth places: a Denny's restaurant in Riverside County.

But at the end of the sting operation, agents were left holding a speck of lunar dust smaller than a grain of rice and a 74-year-old suspect who was terrified by armed

officials.

Five months after NASA investigators and local agents swooped into the restaurant and hailed their operation as a cautionary tale for anyone trying to sell national treasure, no charges have been filed, NASA isn't talking and the case appears stalled.

The target, Joann Davis, a grandmother who says she was trying to raise money for her sick son, asserts the lunar material

was rightfully hers, having been given to her space-engineer husband by Neil Armstrong in the 1970s.

"It's a very upsetting thing," Davis told The Associated Press. "It's very detrimental, very humiliating, all of it a lie."

The strange case centers on a speck of authenticated moon rock encased in an acrylic-looking dome that appears to be a paper-

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This image displayed on a search warrant shows a very small piece of moon rock, in center of moon, taken from Joann Davis during a sting operation where NASA investigators and local agents swooped into a Denny's restaurant to detain Davis, trying to sell a moon rock. ASSOCIATED PRESS

dealsaver DriveStar Driving School: \$17 for online drivers education classes (\$35 value) See A3 for details.



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### CHATTER BOX

#### Mystery surrounds found remains

A man who died this month at age 80 nearly took a secret to his grave — a secret that was discovered only after his family went through his belongings in a storage unit.

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#### For holidays, price matters most

A week before Halloween and two full months before Christmas, stores are desperately trying to outdo each other in hopes of drawing in customers worn down by the economy.

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Online: Read a report on tainted drinking water in rural areas at fresnobee.com/badwater

### TODAY'S FORECAST

Mostly sunny High 79 Low 52

AQI: Moderate, 52 Details: Weather, B6

Online: fresnobee.com/weather

