

by CHUCK SHEPHERD **ODD FILES**

LEAD STORY

Americans' Special Relationship with "Taxes": It is not just that the secretary of the Treasury owed back taxes for years, or that two other presidential cabinet-level nominees owed back taxes. In January, federal prosecutors revealed that District of Columbia Council member Marion Barry, who was already on probation after a 2005 conviction for failing to file tax returns for the years 1999 through 2004, and subsequently almost tauntingly failed to file a return for 2006, has now doubled-down the taunt by failing to file for 2007. And in March, a Georgia state senator proposed punishment for the 22 members of the legislature who either owed back taxes or had failed to file returns for at least one year since 2002. The 22 were not identified, in compliance with privacy laws, but the Senate's Democratic leader, Robert Brown, outed himself as one of the 22 in the course of calling his scolding colleague a "bloodsucker."

Prodigies

(1) **The 2-Legged Dog:** Pet rescuer Judy Walker of Oviedo, Fla., and Oklahoman Jude Stringfellow are battling over custody of Walker's two-legged puppy, which Walker believes has special needs but which Stringfellow is seeking to adopt, in part to portray Stringfellow's own famous, hind-legs-walking dog "Faith" as a puppy in a movie she is working on. Stringfellow said Walker had reneged on a firm Feb. 2 adoption date and implied that she had hired celebrity attorney Mark Geragos to get the puppy.
 (2) **The 11-Year-Old Bullfighter:** Michelito Peniche killed six young bulls in a single fight before 3,500 spectators in Merida, Mexico, in January, despite the mayor's ban on the event as a child-labor violation (but which was allowed to proceed after Michelito's father appealed to a state prosecutor). Michelito began his career in the ring at age 4.

Can't Possibly Be True

— Gildazio Costa, 54, was arrested in Framingham, Mass., in February and charged with kidnapping and beating his girlfriend following a five-hour-long argument they were having about what the operating hours are for the local library.

— First, Do No Harm: Tennessee anesthesiologist Visuvalingam Vilvarajah was arrested in February in Kentucky and charged with providing controlled-substance prescriptions

Ex-neighbor takes stand against alleged cop killer

By Randy Kalp

OCEANSIDE — Julio Mata said he was a block away parking his trailer when he heard the gunshots that took an Oceanside police officer's life.

After hearing the first gunshot, Mata testified he had thought he backed into a parked vehicle, but quickly realized it was a gunshot after hearing two more shots a few seconds later.

Moments later, Mata, who lived at 675 Arthur Avenue in the working class neighborhood of Mesa Margarita in Oceanside, testified he saw Meki Gaono run into the side of his property at 680 Arthur Avenue. Mata said Gaono, who was wearing a white shirt and shorts, had an object in his arms that was "long and black."

During Mata's testimo-

ny March 12, he identified Gaono as his former neighbor and the person he saw running to 680 Arthur on the evening of Dec. 20, 2006. In addition to seeing Gaono after hearing the shots, Mata said he also saw four people run to 661 Arthur Avenue, a known gang hangout.

Prosecutors allege Gaono, 20, fired the fatal shot that killed Oceanside police Officer Dan Bessant with a scoped .22 caliber rifle from 386 feet away. In his opening statement, Deputy District Attorney Tom Manning said two other teens, Penifoti "PJ" Taeotui and Jose Compre, had also fired handguns — a .22 caliber revolver and 9 mm semi-automatic, respectively — in the direction of the officers from in front of Compre's residence at 622 Arthur Avenue.

Bessant, a father and husband, was gunned down around 6:30 p.m. at the intersection of Arthur Avenue and Gold Drive while he was assisting another officer at a traffic stop. The 25-year-old officer was shot once in the armpit just under his protective vest.

Gaono is charged with a one count of murder in the first degree, as well as a single count each of assault and attempted assault relating to the other officer at the scene and her ridealong participant. Additionally, gang and weapon allegations are attached to the aforementioned charges.

If convicted, Gaono faces life in prison without parole because of the special circumstance allegation that he murdered a police officer. Because he was 17 at the time of the shooting, he is

not eligible for the death penalty.

Taeotui, 18, was sentenced in January to life in prison without parole after he was convicted of the same charges Gaono now faces. Compre, on the other hand, had the murder and assault charges against him dropped last March after a judge found a lack of evidence to put the teen in front of his house at the time of the shooting.

Under cross-examination by defense attorney William Stone, Mata said as he exited his home to go park his trailer, he heard some noises but couldn't say if they were gunshots or not. "We always hear stuff around the neighborhood," Mata said.

Mata's mother, Ana Rodriguez, who had been waiting outside their resi-

dence as her son parked the vehicle, testified she also saw Gaono run to his house and the other people run to 661 Arthur Avenue.

After Mata returned to his residence, he and his mother decided to still take their planned trip to Home Depot. As they drove south on Arthur Avenue, Mata testified they encountered the crime scene and upon seeing an officer with her gun drawn, he altered his course through the neighborhood, which brought them back past their residence.

As they passed by the defendant's house, both witnesses described seeing Gaono outside his house without a shirt. Further, Rodriguez testified she saw him talking to another male with "puffy," shoulder-length hair.

Gaono remains in jail on \$5 million bail.

Locals invited to Next Generation Monterey Jazz Festival

By Bianca Kaplanek

COAST CITIES — What began as "just an experiment" recently earned five local teenage musicians an invitation to the fifth annual Next Generation Monterey Jazz Festival, a three-day event devoted to the future of jazz that is part of the world's longest-running and best-known festival of its kind.

Latin Connection — featuring composer, director and keyboard player Chase Morrin, bass player Michael Valentini, tenor saxophonist Chris Burgess and percussionists Daniel Feldman and Fernando Gomez — is one of only six groups asked to perform as special guests during the April event.

With 15-year-old Chase guiding the performances, it is the only student-directed band in this year's festival. That's quite an accomplishment considering four of the five members have only been performing together since last summer, with Fernando joining the band in January.

When forming Latin Connection, Chase first recruited 16-year-old Daniel, a classmate at Canyon Crest Academy in Carmel Valley. Chase knew 18-year-old Michael and 17-year-old Chris from The Jazz Ensemble, a San Diego big-band group created for young jazz musicians. Fernando, 18, replaced the group's original drummer via a recommendation from Dylan Savage, an international jazz and classical percus-



SMOOTH JAZZ Latin Connection, a jazz quintet featuring, from left, Chase Morrin, Michael Valentini, Fernando Gomez, Chris Burgess and Daniel Feldman, perform March 15 for the third anniversary celebration for Book Works in the Flower Hill Promenade in Del Mar. The band of local teenage musicians was one of only six groups invited to perform as special guests during the Next Generation Monterey Jazz Festival in April. Photo by Bianca Kaplanek

sionist. "That's pretty high on the compliment list," Chase said.

"It was originally just an experiment to start doing some Latin music," Chase said. "I'd never actually done traditional Latin music with a band, but it worked out pretty well."

"I think we all have different stories about how we got into jazz," he said. "We all really enjoy jazz so it was that same interest that brought us together."

All the band members

began playing instruments in elementary school, but only Michael and Chris come from families with musical backgrounds.

Michael describes himself as a self-taught bassist who never took lessons. "I started off in a garage band playing heavy metal and then I went to more sophisticated rock," he said.

"I went through the different genres of music," Michael said. "I enjoy playing Latin jazz because it's challenging and it's something I can work on and get better at,

unlike rock, which is straightforward with simple chord notes on bass."

Chris said he was drawn to the saxophone after watching his cousin play. "I thought that was pretty cool, and my friends were doing it at the time, so I just figured I'd get into it," he said.

"Ever since I was a little kid, I loved music," Daniel said. "My dad used to tap in the car for fun to music. I started copying him, and I noticed that I could do it pretty well. So I asked him for lessons and I started with a

drum set."

Like Michael, Fernando is a self-taught musician. "Once I got into high school I got in the drum line and learned how to do it right," he said. "Then I slowly started getting into jazz, Latin jazz and world music."

Chase began his career "with this little keyboard I got for Christmas that I played around with," he said. He began formal training in 2002 and has since compiled an

TURN TO MUSICIANS ON A17

No cuts in O'side community block grant funding

By Promise Yee

OCEANSIDE — City Council OK'd \$275,000 in federal community block grant funding for 20 service projects that provide meals, health screenings, youth programs and other community support, in an anonymous vote March 11.

The grant funds are welcome at a time when needs are high, budgets are tight and many state and federal funding guidelines have changed. "The funding is all over the board," John

Lundblad, Neighborhood Services Community Development Block Grant manager, said. "Reporting and requirements are very different."

The public service projects were funded at individual amounts between \$2,300 and \$34,400, receiving the same amounts as last year.

The Angel's Depot, Women's Resource Center, Interfaith Community Services, Oceanside Senior Citizens Association, and a dozen teens from the North County

Lifeline youth program publicly thanked the city for funding.

"We are grateful for city support," Susan Hall, executive director with The Angle's Depot, said. "Oceanside is the largest distribution site, with 190 recipients."

The \$8,540 funded to The Angel's Depot helps supports its yearly budget of more than \$467,000. As a rule, block grant funding only supports a portion of project costs. The remainder of needed funds must be

raised by the organizations.

"You're all angels for us," Councilwoman Esther Sanchez said. "If you didn't do what you do, our city wouldn't be what it is."

Capital projects were given the OK to receive \$225,000 in community block grant funding. Renovation costs were approved for the S.U.N neighborhood improvement project, Oceanside Senior Center, Family Recovery Center kitchen and T.E.R.I., Inc. outdoor area.

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