

the Napa Valley Register

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Snail trail
State officials are searching giant African snails, which can grow as big as a human fist and eat a whole head of lettuce in one sitting.

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Middle school shooting

Two Silverado students hurt, one classmate arrested

By JACK KATZANEK
Register Staff Writer

Two students were wounded by gunfire at this morning when a third student opened fire in a Silverado Middle School science class.

One student suffered a wound to the arm, and the second was grazed by a bullet that passed through his shirt close to his chest.

The suspect, who fellow students identified as John McMahan, was disarmed by a teacher on school grounds and placed into custody by Napa police.

Student Jimmy Wynn was shot in the upper portion of the left arm, according to Napa police Lt. Gary Domingo. The second, identified by students as Paul Gilbert, was nicked in the chest by a bullet that did not break the skin.

Neither injury is considered serious, a Queen of the Valley Hospital representative said.

"The kid was making comments throughout the week that I'm going to kill a teacher," said David Wildman, principal. "He gave no names. He apparently made the statements before but nobody took him seriously," said the principal.

The incident occurred at 8:40 a.m. during a first-period science lab class. Witnesses said the student allegedly brought the handgun into the classroom where students were dissecting worms around a lab table. He fired at least one round.

Police said they have no motive for the alleged action by McMahan this morning, however, the suspect "made threats" to various kids throughout the week. He's obviously very troubled about something," said Police Chief Dan Monez, who rushed to the scene this morning with other officers and investigators.

Eighth grader Mike Pemberton, in the science lab at the time of the shooting, said everyone ran out of the room through doors and windows, including teacher David Duddles who some speculate was the target of the gunman.

A fellow student said McMahan told friends he planned to "shoot his teacher and everyone else" in his class.

Domingo said detectives are going to spend time today interviewing science teacher Duddles and the other students in the classroom.

"I don't know if he had a specific target," Domingo said. "We're getting reports the firearm was pointed at the teacher, but we have to follow up on that."

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Above, Napa police officers lead eighth-grade student John McMahan into a patrol car this morning after he allegedly wounded two students in a shooting incident at 8:40 this morning. Students raced into the halls after the shooting and were eventually evacuated from classrooms. Students were ushered onto fields to await help from counselors and allow investigators to comb the school for evidence.

AL FRANCIS
Register photos



Parents afraid of violence in the schools

By DIANA MEREDITH
Register Staff Writer

This morning's shooting incident at Silverado Middle School, in which two students were injured, neither critically, has added fuel to the fire of concern about school safety.

"They're going to have to start doing something about these kids. There's just no respect," said Nancy Meyerhoffer, whose son attends Silverado. Meyerhoffer was trying to find her son among the crowd of hundreds of students milling around the school field after the incident.

Parent concerns recently have focused on gangs in schools, but initial reports indicate this morning's shooting was not gang-related. Students who know the suspect said he is a quiet boy who was teased a lot, and district officials say as far as they know, the shooting had nothing to do with rivalry between groups.

The incident nevertheless has caused an uproar among parents who have complained for months about alleged gang activity in schools.

Pam Stoddard, a Napa parent who recently formed a group called Safety Advocates for Students, called today for the resignation of the entire school board, district superintendent Jack Gyves, Silverado principal David Wildman and district transportation director John Krieger.

Stoddard has repeatedly complained that the district did not take necessary measures to protect children, a charge with which Gyves strongly disagrees.

"We have our own procedures going to combat what we and the

See VIOLENCE, Page 4

Town Center wins tax break from county assessor

By BEN FOX
Register Staff Writer

In an action that will cost the city of Napa more than \$100,000, property taxes on the downtown mall will be rolled back, Napa County's tax assessor announced today.

The reduced tax revenue will dent the budget of Napa's Redevelopment Agency and hurt its efforts

to revitalize downtown, said Randy Starbuck, the agency's coordinator.

Capping 10 months of negotiations, County Tax Assessor John Tuteur reached a settlement agreement Wednesday in an appeal by the Los Angeles-based bank that owns Napa Town Center to lower the property's base year value from

\$10.5 million to \$8.6 million. The base year value is the figure from which property taxes are determined and can only be increased by 2 percent a year under Proposition 13.

The bank, Mitsui Manufacturer's Bank, also won a temporary reduction of the property assessment to \$5.25 million because of the sluggish economy and the mall's inability to fill vacancies.

Mitsui has owned the downtown mall since August 1990, when it took control from the property's previous owners in a foreclosure.

The bank first appealed its property assessment in September 1991, according to Tuteur.

"We felt they had given us sufficient evidence to back up that figure," Tuteur said.

Napa County must now repay Mitsui about \$70,800 in back taxes: a payment of \$15,800 for the tax period covering September 1990 to June 1991 and \$55,000 for the current tax year.

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Students, adults attacked by birds at Mount George School

By KEVIN COURTNEY
Register Staff Writer

Dive-bombing black birds have turned Mount George School in east Napa into a battleground this week.

Parents and students have been bopped on the head by adult birds protecting nearby nests.

"I was going out to my car when all of a sudden, boom - I was hit on the left side of my head. I could feel him pecking at my hair," said Dodie Kilgore, parent of a Mount George student.

"It was just like something from Alfred Hitchcock," said Kilgore, referring to Hitchcock's movie, "The Birds."

"At least 50-60-70 people have been attacked," said Helen Wood-

worth, school secretary. "The wife of the custodian was hit so hard her glasses came off."

"Everybody says it's a weird feeling to have a bird in your hair. It's creepy," Woodworth said.

She said these attacks are unusual because the birds are actually striking people on the head. These are not the customary warning swoops, she said.

The attacks began Friday and continued with the resumption of classes Monday, Woodworth said.

At least one nest was built in a juniper next to the school and parking lot where hundreds of people pass daily, she said.

When the attacks showed no sign of ending, the school asked the state Department of Fish and

Game for advice.

Fish and Game advised the school to be patient and wait out the attacks, Woodworth said.

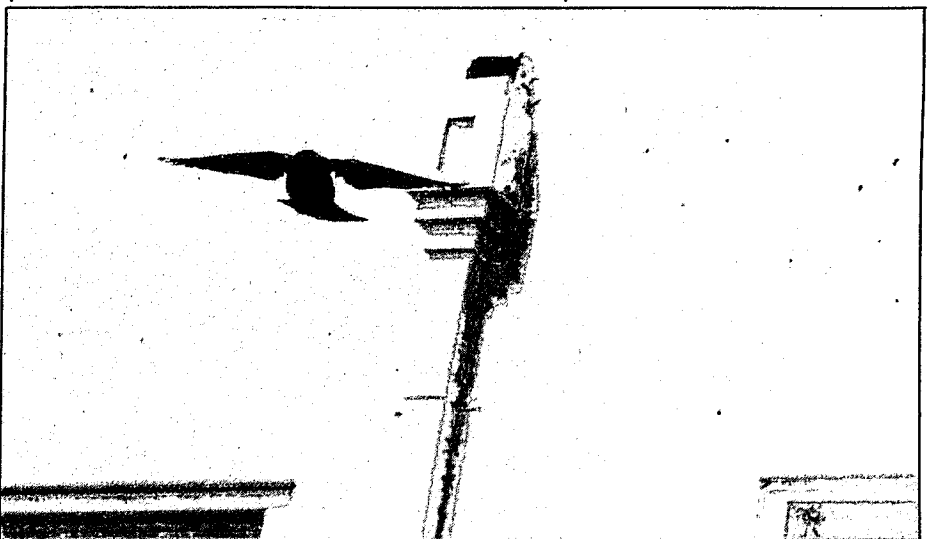
"Black birds are most notorious for defending their nests and their young," said Jim Swanson, a Fish and Game biologist.

But because black birds are a native species, they are protected by state law, Swanson said. Their nests and young can be removed only in exceptional circumstances, he said.

On Wednesday, the school decided that enough was enough. Staff removed a nest with four babies who were old enough to fly away, Woodworth said.

Unfortunately, the attacks have

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A blackbird protects its territory at Mount George School.

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