

LOCAL NEWS

Judge rules for injured worker

Despite being an illegal immigrant, he's awarded workers' comp

BY KAREN LEE ZINER
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — In a nearly unprecedented case, a judge yesterday issued a preliminary order awarding workers' compensation to Edgar Velásquez, a Mexican illegal immigrant who slashed his face to the bone with a chainsaw last year while working for a Warwick tree company.

Velásquez, 22, was deported last year before he could pursue his case. By rare exception, the U.S. government granted him a humanitarian visa to return to Rhode

Island to have his day in court. Pressure brought by the Mexican consulate in Boston, the Mexican-American Association of Rhode Island and Sen. Jack Reed secured the visa.

Workers' Compensation Judge Bruce Q. Morin ordered that William J. Gorman Jr., owner of Billy G's Tree Care, pay Velásquez \$800 for two weeks' salary and medical costs that so far approach \$17,000.

Velásquez's lawyer, Stephen J. Dennis, called the preliminary findings a victory.

"We won. This is huge," said

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Dennis. He said he knew of no other jurisdiction where an injured undocumented worker has been allowed to return to the country to face an employer in court. Turning to Velásquez, Dennis said, "We did it. It took a lot of work, and I thank

you for your courage."

But Dennis said he will pursue a trial to seek more money for Velásquez, based on revised medical assessments.

Judge Morin said depending on the evidence, he could award more benefits, affirm his original order, or reverse it. The lawyers have five days to file for a trial, otherwise his order becomes final, he said last night.

Michael A. St. Pierre, who represents Gorman, could not be re-

SEE WORKER, A7



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / BILL MURPHY

Edgar Velásquez, center, is congratulated by his lawyer, Stephen J. Dennis, right, in Workers' Compensation Court yesterday morning. At left is Dr. Antonio Barajas, who was acting as a translator for Velásquez.

Umbrellas go up for whoever drops in



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / BOB THAYER

Waiter Jackie Bucci, of North Providence, sets up the umbrellas and tables at Water's Edge Restaurant & Bar on Waterman Lake, in Smithfield. The sprinkles began to come down yesterday, but diners on the patio were well protected by the umbrellas.

2 groups may quit health network

Coastal Medical and Ob-Gyn Associates are unhappy with reimbursements from UnitedHealthcare.

BY FELICE J. FREYER
JOURNAL MEDICAL WRITER

Subscribers of UnitedHealthcare of New England have been hearing some worrisome news lately: two big medical groups have threatened to pull out of United's network, possibly forcing patients to find new doctors or to pay more to see their regular ones.

But a top state official, who monitors negotiations because state workers are covered by United, thinks patients don't need to worry. Beverly E. Najarian, the state's director of administration, said that United and Coastal Medical, the 56-doctor primary-care practice, are "very close" to reaching an agreement.

United spokeswoman Debora Spano said she was "optimistic" that an agreement could be reached, and Coastal Medical's senior vice president, George W. Babcock, declined to comment yesterday because "these are sensitive discussions."

Things are looking a little bleaker

SEE UNITED, A4

Police testify in Warwick mother's murder trial

Kimberly A. Mawson, 37, faces a charge of second-degree murder in the 2002 death of her 19-month-old daughter, Jade.

BY TALIA BUFORD
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

WARWICK — As doctors took 19-month-old Jade Mawson into surgery, her mother was fielding questions about how the child received the injuries to her head which would ultimately prove fatal, witnesses testified yesterday. Kimberly A. Mawson, 37, is on trial for second-degree murder in the 2002 death of her daughter.

Warwick Police Detective Eric Johnson got the call around 5 p.m. on Dec. 2, 2002, to head over to Hasbro Children's Hospital to investigate a child with serious injuries, he testified yesterday. The child, Jade, had a broken rib, a vaginal injury, a torn intestine, and bruises to her head, chest and back.

In a small room outside of the pediatric intensive-care unit, Johnson and his partner, Detective Roger Courtemanche, asked Mawson to tell them how Jade got hurt.

Mawson said the bump on Jade's head came when a jewelry box fell on the child's head as she

SEE TRIAL, A7

NAACP honors local success stories

The state's child advocate, Jametta O. Alston, who has filed a class-action suit claiming the state has failed to protect children in its custody, receives the group's Thurgood Marshall Award.

BY KATIE MULVANEY
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — Jametta O. Alston's mother prodded her to get a college education so she could walk out the door if her husband ever beat or hurt her.

"She just saw it as an escape," said Alston, Rhode Island's child advocate.

Late in life, her mother expressed disbelief that she had raised a lawyer, a woman who thrived in a traditionally men's field.

Thomas "Tony" Brown's father forgot his lunch one day, forcing his son to deliver it to him in the dust-covered bowels of massive electric generators.

"I don't think I did anything brave. I'm just here doing my job."

JAMETTA O. ALSTON

His father accepted the meal with a message: "This is good honest work; it's nothing to be ashamed of, but you can do better than this. It's your's to choose."

"Ever since then, I've decided my world view is the world," said Brown, a senior vice president for global purchasing for the Ford Motor Co. "It was my task to pay it forward."

Alston and Brown show the gains made by African Americans in a single generation. Clifford R. Montiero, president of the NAACP's Providence branch, said at a news conference yesterday. Born to parents with limited educations, both have risen to be leaders, Brown in the corporate

world and Alston in the public sector, he said.

"We're grateful we have someone who's achieved so much," Montiero said. "You really cover where we need to be as a people."

The NAACP honored both for their accomplishments at its 94th annual Freedom Fund dinner last night at the Providence Marriott hotel.

Brown oversees supplier diversity development, ensuring that Ford buys a portion of its parts from minority and women-owned businesses. Since 1968, \$35 billion in supplies have come from such companies, he said.

Ford is not driven by altruism. Seeking out minorities is an economic decision that works on the philosophy of creating a "virtuous circle," he says. Businesses owned by women and minorities tend to be located in economically deprived areas that they, in

SEE NAACP, A7

Head of drug ring has plea bargain

Joanna "Rosa" Gonzalez and 28 others were charged in connection with an investigation that the police dubbed Operation Rosa.

BY GREGORY SMITH
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — The ringleader of a large-scale drug-peddling operation, whose arrest caused a minor sensation because the police said she and at least five of her alleged conspirators were collecting welfare from the state, has pleaded no contest to four charges.

Joanna "Rosa" Gonzalez, a 28-year-old mother of three, and 28 other people were arrested and

SEE PLEA, A4

Woman accused of smothering man pleads not guilty

Police say Heather M. Catterall, 28, used a trash bag to kill the man for whom she cooked and cleaned in exchange for staying at his home.

BY CYNTHIA NEEDHAM
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

WARWICK — The woman accused of smothering her elderly roommate with a trash bag pleaded not guilty to a murder charge in Superior Court yesterday and was ordered held without bail.

Prosecutors say Heather M. Catterall, 28, of 41 Overbrook Ave., served as an informal caregiver to Albert Dubois, 76, staying in his home in exchange for cooking and cleaning.

Following an argument between the two over money on either July 17 or 18, prosecutors say, Catterall smothered Dubois with a garbage bag, killing him. She then allegedly took a handful of his cash and drove off in his car. Over the course of the next two days, prosecutors say she also forged two checks.

Dubois' body was discovered on July 20 when his stepson, who'd worried that Dubois wasn't answering the phone, stopped by to check on him. The stepson found Dubois dead in his bedroom.

The stepson, who has not been identified, named Catterall as a possible suspect and said he wondered if she and his stepfather had been "involved in a relationship." That night, the police found Dubois' car outside Groucho's, a Warwick bar, and arrested Catterall as she fled out a back door of

the bar.

Last month a grand jury indicted Catterall on one count of murder, one count of larceny less than \$500, and two counts of passing bad checks.

She pleaded not guilty to each of those charges yesterday and was ordered held without bail at the Adult Correctional Institutions, where she has been since her arrest.

Catterall is due back in court for a pretrial conference on Dec. 7.

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Heather M. Catterall faces a charge of murder.