

NEWS DIGEST

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School shooting questions linger

FORT GIBSON, Okla. (AP) — A day after a 13-year-old was accused of shooting four schoolmates, friends and neighbors in this small rural town were baffled as to why a popular, church-going, honor-roll student would do such a thing.

He liked video-games, touch football and his mom's cookies. He had a birthday party every year.

And yet, on Monday, the seventh-grader allegedly opened fire outside the Fort Gibson Middle School with the gun his father had bought a few years ago at a Wal-Mart. Four students were wounded, though none of their injuries was considered life-threatening.

"He was always nice to everybody, said Deania Pruitt, an eighth-grade cheerleader. "He was real popular. You would never have known him to do anything like this."

Authorities and the boy's lawyer have refused to release his name because of his age and because charges have not been filed, but schoolmates

who witnessed the shooting identified the boy as Seth Trickey.

"He was a 'no sir, yes sir' kid," said Tina Mayo, who lives across the street with her 13-year-old son, Michael.

"We played football, Nintendo and hide and seek," Michael Mayo said of Seth's birthday party Friday night.

Most young witnesses said the boy didn't say anything during the shooting. But Justin Barnes told Tulsa TV station KOTV that the boy started yelling: "I'm crazy, I'm crazy." Sheriff's Lt. Tim Brown said, "To our knowledge, the boy never said a word."

Police Chief Richard Slader said the boy fired at least 15 times outside the school before a science teacher pinned him against a wall and had more ammunition available.

Authorities said they weren't aware of any previous trouble involving the teen, who attended church regularly. He didn't leave any notes, and his parents have refused to let him talk with police. Because of his age, police need permission to question Seth. Officers

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DEANIA PRUITT
eighth-grade cheerleader

searched his home and several school lockers.

Shailla Benjamin said she rode the school bus with the boy. "He lived in a very nice, very pretty home," she said. "Lots of people liked him."

Prosecution as a juvenile could lead to a sentence as harsh as incarceration until age 21 or as lenient as being returned to the custody of his parents with instructions to undergo treatment.

Students returning to school Tuesday were met with metal detectors, more than 50 counselors and uniformed officers.

"They're going to be all right," said Ronnie Darden as he waited to drop off

his 10-year-old daughter, Kayleigh, and 12-year-old son, Drew. "We have more than adequate faith in the administration and the school."

Classes for the middle school students were held in an adjacent elementary school. The middle school remained closed as authorities wrapped up their investigation.

Some of the teachers began the morning by letting students make greeting cards for the three students still hospitalized. A 12-year-old girl was in fair condition with a cheek wound, a 13-year-old was wounded in the forearm and another 13-year-old underwent surgery for a leg wound.

Productivity rises; inflation kept down

WASHINGTON (AP) — Workers' productivity, a key to national economic vitality, grew at the fastest rate in seven years in the third quarter. At the same time, companies' labor costs actually declined — a recipe for keeping inflation at bay.

Tuesday's report was good news for investors wary of signs of inflation that could trigger another interest rate increase from the Federal Reserve.

The Dow Jones average of industrial stocks rose immediately after release of the government report but closed down 118 points Tuesday, at 11,106.65. Analysts attributed the drop to investor jitters about the outlook for some big companies, such as Coca-Cola.

"To get the strong productivity growth at this point in an expansion is really an extraordinary achievement," said Martin Baily, chairman of President Clinton's Council of Economic Advisers. The U.S. economy's continuing upswing is at a peacetime record of eight years and counting.

Productivity, defined as the amount of output for each hour of

work, rose at a 4.9 percent annual rate from July through September, the Labor Department said.

At the same time, unit labor costs, considered a good measure of inflation pressures, fell at a 0.2 percent annual rate — the biggest drop since spring 1997.

Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan and other economists have linked the recent years' upturn in American productivity to massive investments businesses have made in computers and other technology.

As long as workers are increasingly productive, employers can afford to pay them more without needing to raise prices.

If productivity falters, however, pressures for higher wages can result in price increases. The Fed already has raised interest rates three times this year, trying to prevent inflation, and Greenspan has said the nation's central bankers are staying alert for any slowdown in productivity.

The Fed policy-makers' next meeting is Dec. 21. Few analysts now expect them to touch interest rates again this year.

NASA gives up hope of contacting lander

■ An investigation will pore over the entire Mars program for answers.

PASADENA, Calif. (AP) — The last realistic opportunity to contact the Mars Polar Lander ended Tuesday with no sign of life from the missing spacecraft, all but ending hope that the \$165 million mission can be saved.

NASA Administrator Dan Goldin said Tuesday the investigation will examine the space agency's entire Mars program and could delay upcoming missions.

Engineers have now eliminated all simple explanations for why they have not heard from the probe since its descent into the Martian atmosphere Friday. Two microprobes that were to have landed separately also were lost.

"After four increasingly difficult days, the Mars Polar Lander flight team played its last ace," a somber Richard Cook, the spacecraft's operations manager at NASA's Jet Propulsion

Laboratory, said after Tuesday's early morning attempt.

The Mars Polar Lander is the second spacecraft to be lost over the Red Planet in less than three months. Like with Mars Climate Orbiter, internal investigators and outside experts will look at every detail of the mission — from development to disappearance.

The investigation into the loss will also explore all aspects of the Mars program and could result in missing the scheduled 2001 launch of an orbiter and lander as well as delaying sample return missions that were to bring Red Planet rocks to Earth by 2008, Goldin told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

Over four days and six contact opportunities, engineers methodically eliminated possibilities that would explain the lander's silence, including a mispointed antenna, an inoperative direct-to-Earth connection and other computer safe-mode scenarios.

Efforts to reach it will continue for about two weeks, but no answer is expected.

Albright: Syria leader is serious about peace

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said she was "much more hopeful" about the prospect of renewed Israeli-Syrian peace talks after meeting Tuesday with Syria's president, Hafez Assad.

Albright said Assad is serious about peace with Israel, and she telephoned President Clinton with a report on her talks. She planned to meet Wednesday in Jerusalem with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

Albright would not discuss details of the session before traveling to Israel, the third stop of a four-day Middle East trip. She gave no indication Assad had moderated his territorial demands but said: "I just believe, without going into any detail, that I am more optimistic."

A senior U.S. official said Assad had provided clarifications of Syria's positions. But the official, who insisted on anonymity, gave no clear word on

what the Syrian leader had said to cause Albright's expression of optimism.

"Discussions about negotiations are very much like mushrooms," she said at a news conference. "They do much better when they are not in the light."

"The American role is one of trying to be helpful," she said after the three-hour meeting with Assad in his hilltop palace. "Clearly, the president has taken a personal interest in this whole process," she said.

Talks between Syria and Israel broke down 3½ years ago. Assad has demanded Israel acknowledge it would return the Golan Heights, a strategic territory Syria lost in the 1967 Mideast War. Other issues Albright had been expected to question Assad about included the "character" of peace with Israel, the timing of it and security arrangements along the two countries' border.

World and Nation Datelines

■ Washington

Supreme Court reinstates California privacy law

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Tuesday reinstated a California law that limits who gets access to police records that list the names and addresses of arrested suspects.

By a 7-2 vote, the court reversed rulings that had struck down the privacy law as a violation of free-speech rights.

The decision was a victory for the Los Angeles Police Department and a setback for the United Reporting Publishing Corp., which had sold lists of arrested people's names and addresses to lawyers, insurance companies and others.

The 1996 law allows release of such information only to people with "a scholarly, journalistic, political or governmental purpose or ... a licensed private investigator." Anyone seeking access to the records has to pledge they will not be sold as a "product or service."

■ Netherlands

Student accused of opening fire in Dutch school

VEGHEL, Netherlands (AP) — A teen-age student apparently bent on revenge opened fire inside a high school in the Netherlands on Tuesday, wounding a teacher and four students in the first school shooting in Dutch history.

In a drama now chillingly familiar in the United States but unprecedented in this country known for its strict gun-control laws, the 17-year-old suspect fired more than 10 shots inside the regional vocational school in Veghel, about 60 miles south of Amsterdam. He then surrendered to police.

The victims were taken to hospitals, where two of the students were in critical condition. The teacher, a 46-year-old woman, and another student were in stable condition and out of danger after surgery. A fifth student suffered a minor bullet graze wound, police said Tuesday evening.

Police did not identify the suspect, in line with Dutch privacy laws. The gunman opened fire with a pistol of unknown caliber in a school hallway and in a computer room crowded with students shortly after 2 p.m.

Police spokeswoman Gerda Preusting said the suspect was upset over a romance and appeared to be looking for someone who was not there.

■ Seattle

Seattle police chief resigns after violent WTO protests

SEATTLE (AP) — Seattle's police chief announced his resignation Tuesday, becoming the first political casualty of the violent protests that disrupted the World Trade Organization conference.

Police Chief Norm Stamper had been harshly criticized by civic leaders, police officers and others for his handling of the demonstrations last week that cost downtown merchants nearly \$20 million in lost sales and property damage. The protests got so out of hand that the National Guard was called in and a curfew was imposed.

Stamper, 54, said he had planned to announce his retirement in January but did so now in hopes of removing politics from the examination of what went wrong.

Mayor Paul Schell has also come under fire. But at a news conference with Stamper at his side, he repeated that he will not resign.

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