

News Briefs

Compiled by Trevor Metcalfe

Italian women protest premier

Thousands of Italian women and their supporters protested the sexual conquests of Premier Silvio Berlusconi across the country. The premier is accused of soliciting sex from a 17-year-old. Though prostitution in Italy is not criminalized, paying a minor for sex is. The scandal follows 10 years of allegations and charges against the premier. Followers of Berlusconi, who is in divorce proceedings with his wife, said the allegations are politically oriented.

Rep. Giffords makes steady recovery

Families and friends of Arizona Rep. Gabrielle Giffords said the congresswoman is making a slow but steady recovery from the Jan. 8 shooting. Her mother reports Giffords is mouthing the words to simple songs like "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," and relearning to walk around her rehabilitation hospital in Houston. However, medical experts said basic brain functions can return easily to patients, while higher functions may take longer to redevelop.

Obama outlines plan to cut national deficit

President Obama unveiled his \$3.73 trillion budget plan in a conference at a Maryland middle school. The plan attempts to trim the federal deficit by more than \$1 trillion over the next decade. The budget cuts funding for more than 200 federal programs and increases revenue from top tax brackets. Republicans said the plan does not cut enough spending and urged the president to consider more actions.

New business offers homeless employees hope

Anne Marie Roberts

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Home Free Bagels, a new business in Asheville, is on a mission to change one million lives by eliminating homelessness and supporting the local community.

"The money that is spent on keeping people homeless, like in shelters, hospital beds and jail, you might as well take that money and send them all to college," said **Chris Sullivan, owner and organizer of Home Free Bagels.** "That's how much money it takes to keep one person homeless for a year. It's as much as your college education."

According to the Asheville-Buncombe Homeless Initiative, about 2,000 people in the Buncombe County area encounter a period of homelessness each year.

The new bagel business seeks to employ members of the homeless community, offering them a way out of homelessness through a living wage of \$11.35 an hour.

"One of the goals is to help provide a living wage for people who really need it right now, especially since times are hard across the country," said **Michelle Rogers, kitchen manager of Home Free Bagels.**

The idea for Home Free Bagels emerged partly from Sullivan's own work with the local homeless community. Sullivan said this led to a realization that something needs to happen.

"If we get (the homeless) back into mainstream society, then money gets freed up, and those that actually need money for just a week or a month can use it to help them rebound and not get stuck in that whirlwind. So, it's very three-dimensional. It can solve a lot of problems," the 30-year-old entrepreneur said.

Lauren Basso, a senior at UNC Asheville who worked on a project with the Asheville-Buncombe Homeless Initiative and the homeless community, said she is excited to see a great solution for such a prevalent issue in the Asheville area.

"So many of the homeless people that we encountered were looking for jobs and mentioned how difficult it is to find one," Basso said. "Homelessness can be such a cyclical problem, because without a job it is nearly impossible to pay for a home to



Rachael Fisher - Staff Photographer

Chris Sullivan, owner and organizer of Home Free Bagels, is trying to end homelessness by providing homeless individuals jobs at Home Free Bagels at an hourly wage of \$11.35.

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Home Free Bagels employs a unique business model that seeks to make a profit while also supporting its employees and the local community.

"We have what I call a triple bottom line," Sullivan said. "While the profit is certainly there, we also have people as our bottom line and community well-being."

Sullivan said she wants to see this model used as a way to inspire and create change across the country.

"I would like to see this as a model for other social entrepreneurs interested in starting a business," Sullivan said. "Instead of opening up another fancy clothes

shop, maybe they can open a fancy clothes shop that employs homeless people. I just want to use this as a way to inspire people with this model."

Though this business model is socially-oriented, Sullivan said she still wants to stress the need for investment to make this vision a reality.

"This is the thing to invest in," Sullivan said. "It's new, it's cutting-edge, it's going to change the world in a whole new way. It's a little bit of a risk because it's new, but the potential is so huge that you could be getting in at the beginning of something historical."

Malaprop's Bookstore/Cafe, Firestorm Cafe & Books and The Dripolator Coffee Bar are all

partnering with Home Free Bagels as distribution locations for the bagels.

"The product you buy, where and who it comes from, how it gets to you and how that all plays into your community is one of the most important factors we can engage in to effect positive social and environmental change," said **Jay Weatherly, owner of The Dripolator Coffee Bar** on Broadway Street. "Supporting a local business that has its mission set in providing opportunity for the betterment of people in the community is what it's all about."

To help raise awareness and the funds they require to start distribution, Sullivan said they need \$20,000 to complete start-up funds.

Sullivan said she hopes this whole venture will inspire people to realize the worth of human beings and the value of community.

"What we don't understand as Americans is that you can't just improve your own life," Sullivan said. "You are part of a network of millions of people no matter what you think. Whatever you do affects others, and so if you improve your life at the cost of someone else's, you're not really improving your life."