

# ARTS & LIFESTYLE

## Of Interest ...

### Vet sues Michael Jackson

SANTA MARIA, Calif. (AP) — Michael Jackson is being sued for unpaid bills by the veterinarian who tends to the pop star's exotic animals at his Neverland ranch, which the singer has not occupied since being acquitted of child molestation charges last June.

Jackson has been living in the tiny Persian Gulf kingdom of Bahrain, but the lawsuit was filed in Santa Maria, Calif., where he stood trial last year.

Martin Dimes, owner of Dimes Memorial Veterinary Hospital, alleges that Jackson owes \$91,602 in veterinary bills. Dimes helped the singer acquire animals for his zoo, including flamingos, giraffes, elephants and orangutans, said his lawyer, Brenton Horner.

Dimes continues to treat the animals regularly, Horner said.

"He filed this (lawsuit) with great reluctance," Horner said. "He has a lot of admiration for Michael. This is just a business matter."

A hearing was set for May 2. Jackson lawyer Thomas Mesereau Jr. said he had not seen the complaint and could not comment.

### Fire destroys Chicago birthplace of gospel music

CHICAGO (Reuters) — Fire destroyed on Friday Chicago's 116-year-old Pilgrim Baptist Church, a historic landmark that was built as a synagogue and became known as the birthplace of American gospel music.

Towering flames collapsed the peaked wooden roof and brick columns of the 1890 church designed by architects Louis Sullivan and Dankmar Adler.

No one was injured by the blaze, but a custodian who had been inside said a repair crew had been working on the roof when the fire broke out, Chicago Fire Department Commissioner Cortez Trotter told reporters.

Church officials said extensive repairs had been performed on the building, which was declared a landmark in 1981 but had been deteriorating.

The synagogue, initially run by Adler's father, a rabbi, was converted into a church in the 1920s as the area's Jewish population migrated elsewhere. It became an anchor of the once-thriving Bronzeville neighborhood for Chicago's growing black population.

Thomas A. Dorsey, the son of a Baptist minister and a church organist, became the church's music director, melding blues with sacred hymns into gospel music.

His choir featured such stars as Mahalia Jackson, James Cleveland and Sally Martin. Among Dorsey's many compositions performed at the church were "Take My Hand, Precious Lord."

### Page Laughlin at SECCA

The Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art will present Winston-Salem resident and Wake Forest University faculty member Page Laughlin's "Zoom In Zoom Out" Jan. 21 through April 7.

Using an array of stylized images from high-end interior design magazines as a starting point, Laughlin confuses and explores the underlying issues surrounding this seemingly grandiose lifestyle.

According to the artist: "I am interested in what these fantasies reveal upon closer inspection and in what is veiled in seduction. Working with these interiors, in a way, mirrors my own relationship to painting. I, too, am creating a fantasy to be examined."

Laughlin will give an artist talk at SECCA's Hot Topics in Contemporary Art on Thursday, Feb. 2, at 5:30 p.m. The ArtTalk is free for SECCA members, \$5 general admission, and \$3 for students and seniors. Refreshments will be served.

For more information, call (336) 725-1904 or visit [www.secca.org](http://www.secca.org).

### "Sopranos" actor arraigned

NEW YORK (AP) — Under the glare of off-duty police officers packing a Bronx courtroom, "Sopranos" actor Lillo Brancato Jr. and a co-defendant were arraigned Monday on charges that they killed a policeman who confronted them during a burglary.

Scores of other officers who couldn't squeeze into the gallery milled in the hallway during the five-minute session, applauding as the slain officer's parents entered and left the courtroom.

Brancato, 29, and Steven Armento, 48, pleaded not guilty to charges of second-degree murder, burglary and weapon possession before state Supreme Court Justice John Collins. Armento, accused of being the triggerman, also was charged with two counts of first-degree murder in the Dec. 10 killing of Officer Daniel Enchautegui, who was shot while off duty.

Both defendants entered the courtroom with their hands cuffed behind them. Enchautegui's father, Pedro, sat in a wheelchair in the center aisle near his wife, Maria.

Prosecutors say the defendants told police that they had been together at a strip club before deciding to break into a Bronx apartment in search of prescription drugs. Enchautegui, who lived next door, confronted them in an alley.

Brancato has said that Armento opened fire after Enchautegui identified himself as a police officer and ordered them to freeze, authorities say.

"Lillo Brancato is not a murderer," Brancato's lawyer, Mel Sachs, said as he left the courthouse with the defendant's family. "Lillo Brancato is not criminally responsible. Lillo Brancato did not have a weapon and did not know there was a weapon."

Brancato made his debut in 1993 in "A Bronx Tale," starring opposite Robert De Niro, and went on to appear in more than a dozen movies. He also had a recurring role in "The Sopranos" as an aspiring mobster.

## BET has best ratings ever in 2005

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

BET Networks is riding a high after posting its highest viewership numbers ever last year.

BET's viewership increased by an impressive 17 percent from 2004 to 2005. The company also celebrated its 25th anniversary; fine-tuned its business portfolio; made executive moves focused on original programming; and refreshed its market identity with new graphics and an edgier attitude.

All of this happened in just the first six months of Debra Lee's tenure as CEO. Lee took over for BET founder Bob Johnson.

"We're generating the kind of results that should make BET affiliates, advertisers, viewers and supporters take notice. Every part of the BET organization is contributing to that success," said Lee. "The momentum we have gives us optimism heading into 2006. The thought of trying to match or surpass last year's performance is a challenge we cer-

tainly welcome."

Lee continued: "I see successes and milestones as ingredients you use to set your next slate of goals and objectives. BET has never taken success lightly. We're already hard at work on making 2006 another great year."

While BET's business platform is thriving, its holding company, Viacom Inc. is changing. Last week, Viacom officially split into two separate companies — CBS Corp., with radio, broadcast television, publishing and outdoor advertising among its brands; and a "new" version of Viacom that features MTV Networks, Paramount Pictures, Famous Music and BET Networks.

"It's an exciting new day for both Viacom and BET," said Lee. "Our company is now an even bigger part of the overall Viacom business strategy. This bodes well for future investment in the BET brand."

In 2005, BET made some

See BET on A11

Husband and wife actors Will Smith and Jada Pinkett-Smith hosted the popular "BET Awards" last year. Millions watched the show, which featured appearances by some of the biggest names in the entertainment industry.



## Living Boldly

'Last Holiday' stars rapper/actors

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Living life to the fullest is the theme of Queen Latifah's latest film, "Last Holiday," a romantic comedy that also stars LL Cool J, Timothy Hutton, Gerard Depardieu, Alicia Witt and Giancarlo Esposito.

Paramount Pictures will release "Last Holiday" nationwide tomorrow (Jan. 13).

Latifah says that the comedy taps into a basic human emotion. "Try to imagine how you would feel if you were told that you only had a few weeks to live. All the dreams, all the desires, all the things you wanted to do and thoughts you wanted to express are in jeopardy of being unfulfilled. Where do you begin?"

Latifah plays Georgia Byrd, who lives a small life tucked inside big dreams. A shy cookware salesperson for a department store, she handles knives and skillets with the flair of a master chef and dreams of one day opening her own restaurant.

She has a secret crush on a co-worker, portrayed by LL Cool J, but is too timid to let him know. However, when a misdiagnosis leads Georgia to believe her days are numbered, she decides that if she has to go, she's going to go with a bang — and embarks on a dream holiday vacation to a grand resort in Europe.

There, thinking she has nothing to lose, Georgia undergoes a metamorphosis... and her transformation affects everyone around her. Georgia's newly uninhibited personality shakes up staff and guests alike, including a venerated chef, portrayed by Gerard Depardieu. From snowy slopes to spectacular spas, delectable dinners to midnight balls, Georgia is going to live a lifetime of fun in just a few weeks.

"This film gave me a chance to get into the bones of someone very different from me," she noted. "Most of the characters I've played are vocal and outgoing, and this was a chance to embody someone who is meek and unaccustomed to speaking her mind. Georgia is one of my favorite characters because she's so decent and inspiring."

Director Wayne Wang said of working with Latifah: "At the beginning of the movie, she plays a character completely different from the way I've



LL Cool J



Photo by Stephen Vaughan

See Film on A11 Queen Latifah in "Last Holiday."

## Popular book to be discussed

TBMP is marking 20th anniversary of 'The Color Purple'

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

GREENSBORO — Triad Black Media Professionals in conjunction with The Greensboro Public Library will present a discussion of the book "The Color Purple" on Sunday, Jan. 15, at the Greensboro Historical Museum, 130 Summit Ave., at 3 p.m. This event is free and open to the public.

"We are inviting all those people who loved reading 'The Color Purple' to read the book again and remember why you fell in love with the work and discuss and reflect on the material with others," said Robin Adams, president of Triad Black Media Professionals, an organization of media professionals throughout the Triad.

"I remember the first time I picked up the book, I started reading that day and didn't put the book down until it was finished," Adams said. "The words, the characters, they were all real to me, and I remember thinking, 'This is great.' I look forward to re-examining the material."



Some of Triad's noted authors and literary critics will lead the book discussion.

The literacy discussion is the second event TBMP is holding in a series commemorating the 20th anniversary of the 1985 release of the movie "The Color Purple." The book, by Alice Walker, was published in 1982. Walker tells the story of Celie, a black woman in the South. Celie writes letters to God in which she tells about her life — her roles as daughter, wife, sister, and mother.

In the course of her story, Celie meets a series of other black women who shape her life: Nettie, Celie's sister, who becomes a missionary teacher in Africa; Shug Avery, the blues singer her husband, Mister, is in love with, and who becomes Celie's salvation; Sofia, the strong-willed daughter-in-law whose strength and courage inspire Celie; and Squeak, who goes through awakenings of her own. Throughout the story, though, Celie is the center of this community of women, the one who knows how to survive.

Both the book and the movie have an almost cultlike following.

The TBMP "Color Purple" series opened with a Juke Joint Party on Dec. 11 and will conclude in February with a special showing of the movie.

## Sigel found guilty of assault

MARYCLAIRE DALE THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHILADELPHIA — Beanie Sigel, the rapper who has sold hundreds of thousands of records glamorizing a criminal lifestyle, was convicted of assault last week for a fight in 2003.

Sigel, born Dwight Grant, agreed with the prosecutor's version of events and was convicted of misdemeanor simple assault. He was immediately sentenced to two years of probation plus \$180 in court costs.

The charges stem from an argument between Sigel and a man who said the rapper punched him in both eyes, breaking his left eye socket, during a January 2003 argument outside a Chinese restaurant.

The case was the last in a series of criminal charges against Sigel, who has a long arrest record dating back to his days growing up in South Philadelphia.

With the case behind him, Sigel now plans to "make music, make movies and work on his clothing line," said his attorney, Fortunato N. Perri Jr.

In September, a jury acquitted Sigel of charges that he nearly shot to death a man on a crowded city street two years ago. In August, Sigel left federal prison after serving nearly a year on a federal weapons charge that stemmed from a 2002 traffic stop in Philadelphia.

Sigel also has fallen behind in child-support payments. He was briefly jailed in November until he paid \$27,000 in child support and \$2,000 in fines. He was due in family court last week because he again owes child-support money.



Sigel