

## GAO Report Humbling for Justice Dept.

Ben Sargent is always germane. He draws "Sargent," a cartoon distributed through the Universal Press Syndicate, and he always manages to hit the point — not always most appropriately, but the point is hit nonetheless.

A cartoon by Sargent published this week — which ran in The Washington Post — depicts a bucktoothed, larger-than-life John Ashcroft clad in Santa Claus gear. Our attorney general is fiddling at a personal computer in the dark. The scene is certainly clandestine.



**NATHAN PEREZ**  
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A scroll is unraveled next to the figure. It reads, "You'd better watch out, you'd better not cry, You'd better not pout, I'm telling you why: He taps your phone and reads your e-mail too ..."

"He's making a list, checking it twice, Gonna find out who's naughty or nice: He's got a file on everything you do."

Though the rhyme is not particularly adept, it is an attempt to clue the nation into the new developments involving the Justice Department and the top law enforcement official in the land.

On Monday in Washington, a federal appeals court greatly expanded the authority of the Justice Department to set up wiretaps and other devices to fight terrorism.

John Ashcroft chimed in immediately, "(The decision) is a victory for liberty, safety and the security of the American people."

He continued, "(The ruling) revolutionized our ability to investigate terrorists and prosecute terrorist acts."

Ashcroft is now giddy that he can pursue a more efficient system to process wiretap and surveillance applications.

The review court commended the Justice Department for attempting to bridge the gap between prosecutors and intelligence agents.

The following day, The Washington Post ran a "tech-news" story titled "Agencies Fail Cyber Test."

Tucked away on page 23 of the A section, the story reports that the General Accounting Office — the federal government's officious watchdog — found that many of the federal government's largest agencies, including the Justice Department, had disgustingly low levels of computer security.

Subsequently, the House Government Reform committee on government efficiency gave a failing grade of "F" to 14 of 24 federal agencies.

The highest grade given to one of the major agencies was bestowed upon the Social Security Administration, a "B-." The GAO discovered that previous information and data had been left vulnerable and access controls were all out of whack.

Accordingly, this poor security level leaves most of the federal government's major agencies susceptible to attack by terrorists, crooks, even teenagers.

But the chunky nougat within this journalistic candy bar is that four of the agencies with the worst evaluations — failing in grand measure — were the State Department, the Department of Transportation, the Defense Department (gulp) and the Justice Department (ek).

Ironically, GAO investigators noted the importance of the solidarity of our national computer systems with the continued threat of a terrorist attack.

So our Justice Department has been granted extended authority for surveillance purposes when its own systems and data are an open book to nefarious types and hooligans?

Washington is a mad, mad world. The juxtaposition of Ashcroft's triumph with the humbling GAO report prove much more than the fact that national security is an inexact science.

It is doubtful that Sargent's cartoon intended to offer any shred of compliment to John Ashcroft. But he is dressed as Santa, and we all know that Santa is a good guy.

So maybe, just maybe, Ashcroft is too. Possibly maniacal, certainly overweening, he is still acting during a time of war.

Let's not forget that he's forging new ground in an arena of unique combat with an incomprehensible enemy.

But, let's also remember that the United States can be made safer from within.

If the Justice Department cannot fight an "enemy" as ruthless as the GAO, what good will more power do?

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# Orange County Home Prices Reach New High

Average home prices are highest in Triangle area

By **BILLY BALL**  
Staff Writer

Buyers in search of new homes in Orange County are facing the highest prices in the county's history.

According to Market Opportunity Research Enterprises, a Rocky Mount firm that analyzes land transfer records, the average price of new homes in Orange County swelled well beyond the \$300,000 mark in the past year.

The price of new homes jumped 13 percent, from \$289,740 last year to \$327,360 this year. The numbers coincide with a drop in new homes sold from 643 to 596 over the past year.

Carl Van Horn, spokesman for the Rocky Mount firm, said Chapel Hill's tendency to restrict growth played a part in the surging prices. He also said Orange County is one of the most expensive counties for new homes in the state.

The new home prices for Orange County

are significantly higher than in the rest of the six-county Triangle region, a trend that is consistent with the past.

Orange County Planning Director Craig Benedict said the upward trend in prices has been continuous over the last decade.

In the Triangle, Chatham and Wake counties' housing prices have been closest to Orange County's since last year, at \$246,400 and \$229,170 respectively. Johnston County was the least expensive of the six counties at only \$151,721.

Durham County's average price was \$183,577 while Franklin County's was \$165,168.

Van Horn said Chapel Hill is the largest factor in Orange County's ballooning prices.

Orange County Commissioner Moses Carey said the higher prices in the area might not have anything to do with the economic climate but more to do with the high demand for housing.

Benedict added that new developments in Hillsborough might have had an impact on the gradual price hikes as well.

Benedict said the rising costs have both positive and negative aspects for residents.

He said that the surging costs can be used by homeowners to better their equity but that the rise also could push Orange County homes out of some people's price ranges. "It's a mixed bag," he said.

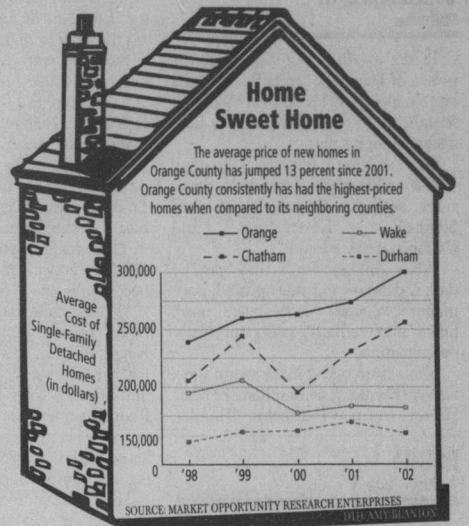
Benedict said the county has taken steps to provide for affordable housing in the past, including the passage of a \$4 million bond in November 2001.

Chapel Hill planning director Roger Waldon said the town historically has the highest costs in the county. "This has always been a very attractive town," he said.

Carey agreed the high prices reflect the great demand for homes in the county.

"People want to live here," he said. "They'll pay anything to do so."

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## DREIDEL, DREIDEL, DREIDEL



Freshman N.C. Hillel member Daniel Miller, a Russian language and literature major, dresses as a giant dreidel Thursday in the Pit. Hillel members dressed as giant dreidels and made edible dreidels to let students know Hanukkah is coming up in two weeks. Miller also danced to "You Spin Me Round (Like a Record)."

## Legislature's Special Session to Close

Staff & Wire Reports

**RALEIGH** — Legislative leaders have agreed to end next Tuesday a special session to redraw state House and Senate districts that began back in the spring.

The session has been kept alive since the N.C. General Assembly adjourned its regular session in October. Both the House and the Senate have held skeleton floor sessions every three days, with only a few lawmakers attending to meet a constitutional requirement.

Senate leaders have placed a joint resolution on the floor calendar to adjourn the session Tuesday. "I'm happy we're adjourning," said Senate President Pro Tem Marc Basnight, D-Dare, on Thursday.

House leaders also have agreed to adjourn. "I really never knew why it was being held open," said House Majority Leader Phil Baddour, D-Wayne, about the special session.

"I think it's great it's being closed."

Republicans have charged that Democrats were keeping the special session alive until after the elections to allow a lame-duck legislature controlled by Democrats to redraw legislative districts or to take other steps in response to court rulings in a lawsuit over redistricting.

"Keeping (the session) open demonstrated to what great ends the Democrats will go to keep power," said Rep. Sam Ellis, R-Wake, who had repeatedly motioned to have the session closed.

Ellis said the Democrats' closing the session is insignificant now because they decided to



Senate President Pro Tem **Marc Basnight** said he is happy to finally adjourn the special session.

close the session only after they determined the party alignment in the courts would not shift in their favor.

"They've adjourned it because they know they don't have a chance in court," he said.

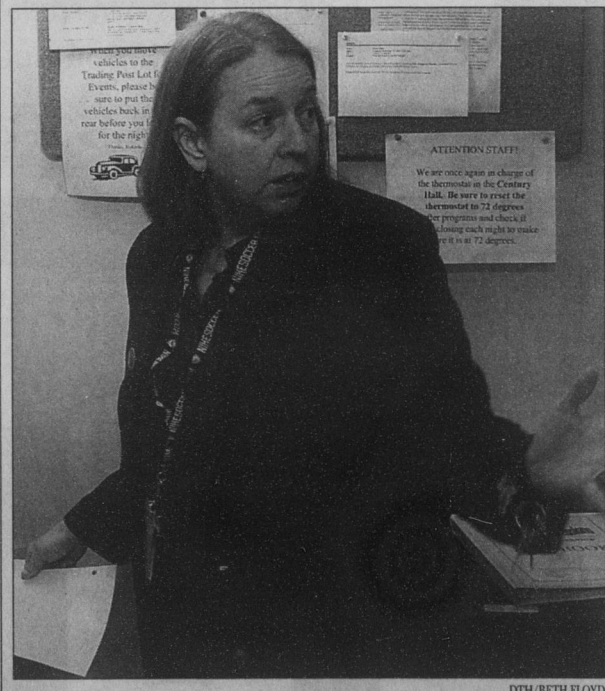
But Basnight and other Democratic leaders said the session was kept open only because of pending litigation. Basnight previously has said that he has wanted to end the session for weeks.

Though the special redistricting session is slated to end Tuesday, lawmakers still will be faced with the task of drawing district lines when they head back to Raleigh in January.

The lines under which this year's election was held were drawn by a Superior Court judge and could stand only for the 2002 election cycle.

Regardless of partisan differences over redistricting, Ellis said, he would like to see Democrats and Republicans in both chambers work together to get the job done efficiently during the 2003 session.

## Disability Becomes Ability for Resident



Ellen Perry, who was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at the age of 2, was recently appointed to the N.C. Council on Developmental Disabilities.

By **KELLY OCHS**  
Staff Writer

Ellen Perry has had to learn how to walk at least five times in her life.

At age 2, she was diagnosed with cerebral palsy after her parents brought her to the doctor with concerns that she still was not walking or talking.

With the help of leg braces, Perry has mastered walking. And her disability has not held her back from community involvement, even though surgeries to help her walk with more ease have forced her to relearn to use her legs several times.

She holds spots on several committees, but Perry also leads a busy lifestyle elsewhere in the community. She is a Girl Scout leader and also works one day a week at the Granville Towers cafeteria in addition to working two days to four days a week at the Century Center in Carrboro.

"She has cerebral palsy, but that hasn't slowed her down," said Sen. Ellie Kinnaird, D-Orange, who has appointed Perry to local committees

See **PERRY**, Page 4

## Florida Universities' BOG Modeled on UNC System

By **MATT CROOK**  
Staff Writer

Florida state universities will be governed by a single entity under an amendment approved Nov. 5 — a plan that is modeled on the UNC system but that will not require legislative oversight on decisions made by the governing body.

Under the new system, a 17-member board of governors will make decisions concerning the state's higher education system. Fourteen members will be appointed by the state legislature. The board also will have student and faculty representation.

Each school will maintain an independent board of trustees, but their memberships will be reduced and compositions changed.

The new system will be similar in structure to the UNC system, said Brad Bartel, provost of Florida Gulf Coast University.

The 16-campus UNC system is governed by a 34-member board, including a nonvoting student and a former N.C. governor, who holds a lifetime membership.

Each school has an independent board of trustees. System budget requests must be approved by the N.C. General Assembly.

Though the system being established in Florida is similar to North Carolina's, some officials say the UNC-system

model is not ideal. The UNC-system BOG has been criticized by some legislators, who think it is too large to be effective. The complaints led to a legislative study commission charged with reviewing the board's structure and function.

Commission Chairman Tony Rand, D-Cumberland, said he thinks the BOG should be much smaller and more decentralized, giving individual boards of trustees increased power. Rand, N.C. Senate majority leader, added that the smaller Florida BOG is a potential model for a revision of the UNC-system board.

Former UNC-system President Bill Friday said size is not the only important difference between the systems. The Florida system is a constitutional body, eliminating the need for the state legislature to approve policy such as university funding, he said. "It's a constitutional body; it eliminates gubernatorial control."

Friday, who was in charge of the UNC system when it was formed more than 30 years ago, is acting as a consultant for Florida as it crafts its new system.

Friday said he thinks the UNC system is a good model because it has prevented duplication of degree programs, led to wise use of money and increased colleges' rankings.

See **FLORIDA**, Page 4