



STILL VERY WARM

Healdsburg
High: 93 Low: 51
Santa Rosa
High: 88 Low: 46
Bodega Bay
High: 78 Low: 54
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50 CENTS

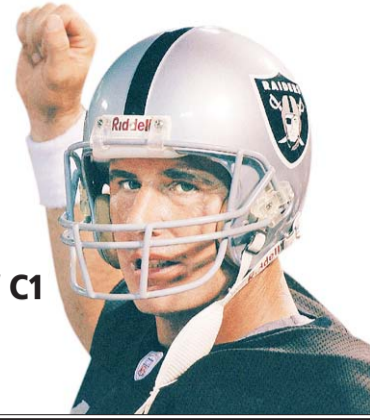
The Press

DEMOCRAT

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2003 • SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA

Gannon out?

Raider QB's status uncertain — injury may be serious tear that could end season / C1



SR woman details attack

87-year-old tells of teens breaking in, beating her / B1

Bank merger

BofA, Fleet will join to create nation's No. 2 bank / E1

Locals join movement to rescind license law

Petition drive aims to put immigrant rule on ballot

By **CECILIA M. VEGA**
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Nearly 300 Sonoma County residents have joined forces with a statewide, Republican-backed campaign that seeks to overturn a law allowing illegal immigrants to obtain drivers' licenses.

Even as Gov.-elect Arnold Schwarzenegger prepares to take office next month, having pledged to rescind the law, the initiative campaign is gaining support across California, extending even to a liberal bastion like the North Coast.

Volunteers have until Dec. 7 to collect 375,000 signatures needed to qualify a referendum for the March election, which would place the fate of the driver's license law in the hands of voters.

Organizers of the group Save Our License said they have collected 100,000 signatures so far and are hoping the rest will come from 250,000 petitions that volunteers are circulating.

Although group spokesman
TURN TO **LICENSES**, PAGE A15

Death toll in Baghdad blasts at 34

Suicide bombers hit police stations, Red Cross office

By **DEXTER FILKINS**
and **ALEX BERENSON**
NEW YORK TIMES

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Suicide bombers who drove carloads of explosives into five buildings around the capital Monday

NEW U.S. FOES SEEN Officials say 34 people in a coordinated assault that spread mayhem across the city and appeared to open a new phase in the guerrilla war against the U.S. occupation.

The bombers struck on the first day of Ramadan, the monthlong Muslim holiday. They hit their targets within a harrowing 45-minute period, attacking the headquarters of the International Committee of the

TURN TO **IRAQ**, PAGE A15

INSIDE

STARVED KIDS CASE

Nine people are fired from the New Jersey child welfare system as investigation grows into case of adopted boys. **A8**

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SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES

DEVASTATED

FIRES' TALLY: 15 DEAD, 1,134 HOMES DESTROYED, 30,000 HOMES AT RISK



Smoke settles in the trees behind several burned homes Monday in the Scripps Ranch neighborhood of San Diego. Flames devoured entire neighborhoods and choked skies over Southern California with ash.

By **TRACY WILSON**
and **STUART PFEIFER**
LOS ANGELES TIMES

LOS ANGELES — Dry, shifting winds kept weary firefighters off balance Monday as wildfires from Mexico to Ventura County spread mostly out of control.

The death toll rose to 15 by Monday evening, with 1,134 homes destroyed and more than 510,000 acres burned. Officials warned an estimated 30,000 homes were at immediate risk.

Wind and visibility improved enough for air tankers to join the firefight, and tenacious crews beat back flames from the Ventura County farm town of Fillmore. By late Monday afternoon, weather forecasters said a shift had begun toward much cooler, moister conditions — the best possible news for those whose homes lie in the paths of the fires.

But the 10 blazes, which began at various points over the past week and turned disastrous Saturday when stoked by dry Santa Ana winds, stubbornly persisted.

"This will be the most expensive fire in California history, both in loss of property and the cost of fighting it," said Dallas Jones, chief of the state Office of Emergency Services.

He estimated firefighting costs would be in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

The most expensive fire in state history had been the Oakland Hills fire in October 1991, which had property losses estimated at \$1.75 billion. Three

TURN TO **DEVASTATED**, PAGE A15

Life, death choices for neighbors

Some tried to run, others stayed put in pool, homes

By **SCOTT GLOVER**
and **JACK LEONARD**
LOS ANGELES TIMES

LAKESIDE — The phone woke Joe McLean shortly after 3 a.m. Sunday and outside he saw the red glow of flames in the hills surrounding his rural home east of San Diego.

He woke his daughter and wife, then alerted a few neighbors. Up and down this winding canyon road in Lake View Hills Estates, residents were waking to the smell of smoke and the noise of barking dogs and honking horns.

With no help from fire crews and no instructions from authorities, families packed up cars, and others set out on foot. There was only one way out: Muth Valley Road.

After the first warning from McLean, the neighbors in this tight-knit community just south of the San Vicente Reservoir made fateful choices. By dawn, four who lived on the street would be dead, and half the homes would be destroyed.

The McLeans had the best vantage point in the hilly neighborhood of 10 custom homes. They could see towering flames

TURN TO **CHOICES**, PAGE A15

INSIDE

SAN DIEGO LAYING LOW

Residents huddle; city idled / **A3**

TRYING TO CUT PATH TO MALIBU

Crews hope to stop Simi Valley fire / **A4**

WHERE EACH FIRE STANDS

The latest on the major blazes / **A15**

NORTH COAST PITCHES IN

200 firefighters on lines in Southern California / **B1**

CLAIMS POUR IN

Insurers send teams to disaster areas / **E1**



Smoke from wildfires around Los Angeles and Southern California, captured by NASA's Aqua satellite Monday, drifts over the Pacific. The blazes are, from top, the Simi Valley fire, the San Bernardino fires, and the San Diego fires.

THE LATEST

SIZE: 511,253 acres among 10 fires from Mexico border to Ventura County.

HOMES: 1,134 destroyed.

DEATHS: 15, with two bodies found Monday. Authorities said most victims appeared to have been trying to flee the wildfires.

PERSONNEL: 10,382 from Southern California fire crews and around the state, including dozens from the North Coast. More firefighters are being sent by Nevada and Arizona.

FIREFIGHTING COSTS: \$23.4 million, with state estimating final tally will be in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

WHAT'S AHEAD: Although most of the fires were out of control, weather forecasters said a shift had begun toward much cooler, moister conditions that could help give fire crews the upper hand.

QUOTABLE: "This will be the most expensive fire in California history, both in loss of property and the cost of fighting it," said Dallas Jones, director of the state Office of Emergency Services

