

SHAKY SHAQ
Recurring foul problems
don't concern Heat star
IN SPORTS



REMEMBER NELL?
She's all grown up now and
working as a service dog
IN ACCENT



**Dry conditions,
lightning increase
brush fire threat**
IN LOCAL

The Palm Beach Post

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1 2 3 4 50 cents

Thieves tap diesel as liquid gold mine

They hit tanks in rural areas and sell the \$3 fuel for as little as \$1.

By SUSAN SALISBURY
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

BELLE GLADE — Detective David Alderman switched off the headlights on his Palm Beach County sheriff's cruiser and drove forward, guided only by a February moon illuminating the sugar cane fields.

Moments earlier, at about 10 p.m., Alderman had seen a solitary light out in the fields about 4 miles west of 20-Mile Bend. It was a light he knew shouldn't be there.

As he arrived at the spot, the light suddenly went out. In front of him, Alderman could see two men in a truck, parked next to a tank of diesel fuel on a U.S. Sugar Corp. farm.

They spotted Alderman, pulled a hose into the truck and sped off down the road.

"They saw me, and they fled with their lights out," he said. "We were able to get them stopped about 6 or 7 miles down the road."

The two men arrested that night — Idelfonso Alfonso, 48, and Luis Pablo Herrera, 39, both of Belle Glade — were charged with grand theft and trespassing. Sheriff's officials say they were stealing diesel fuel and planning to sell it at cut-rate prices to buyers who don't ask many questions.

Fuel thefts, while always a problem in rural areas where vast fields are left unwatched overnight, have risen sharply in recent weeks along with the price of fuel, officials say. Farmers are tightening security, locking tanks, removing fuel that's not needed immediately and pushing to prosecute trespassers.

"It is a very large problem, especially with the cost of fuel right now," said Alderman, one

See DIESEL, 4A ▶

New rule shifts more tax bucks for disabled to private schools

By NIRVI SHAH
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Florida students who get state tax money to go to private schools because they have disabilities now will be entitled to about \$21 million more, taken from programs that would have helped disabled students in public schools.

Changes to federal law will require Florida school districts to pay for services such as speech therapy, physical therapy and occupational therapy for these students, even though they have chosen to attend private schools instead of public schools by using vouchers called McKay scholarships.

The change will benefit about 16,800 private school students statewide, and it will slash school district budgets for students with disabilities in their own schools. It will cost Palm Beach County alone \$1.25 million, money the district otherwise would use on items such as special computers that help students who can't speak or special

See DOUBLE, 10A ▶

All in the GOP family



SCOTT AUDETTE/The Associated Press

TAMPA — U.S. Rep. Katherine Harris, R-Fla., and Gov. Jeb Bush set aside their differences to greet President Bush Tuesday at MacDill Air Force Base. Harris is running for the U.S. Senate against the governor's wishes. The president was touting Medicare's new prescription drug plan. **Story, 8A**

South Lake O outlet urged

A flow way tied to the Everglades could lower the lake, some say.

By ROBERT P. KING
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Fears about the leaky dike around Lake Okeechobee are giving new life to an old idea — opening a major pathway for water to flow from the lake to the Everglades.

Environmentalists have advocated such a southern outlet for decades, saying it would help revive both the lake and the Everglades while lessening the ruinous dumping of lake water into the St. Lucie River.

■ **Where water goes now, how it could flow, 10A**

Now they have a new reason to take up the cause: A state-commissioned engineering report that called the Herbert Hoover Dike a "grave and imminent danger" to human life.

To lessen the risk of the leak-prone levee collapsing, the report's authors and Gov. Jeb Bush have urged the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to lower water levels in the lake. The report also notes that the dike lacks a crucial safety factor that a typical dam would include: an emergency outlet to let rising waters escape.

An expansion of the lake's southern floodgates could serve both functions, Everglades activists say. They're reviving their proposal for the creation of a marshy, shallow "flow way" linking the lake and the Everglades through western Palm Beach County's sugar cane country.

Such a flow way would mirror the way

See DIKE, 10A ▶

**'I really wanted the degree.
I just didn't know I'd enjoy it so much.'**

BACHELOR'S PARTY

Mary Maloney heeded Dr. Phil's advice and, at 79, earned her degree.

By MICHAEL C. BENDER
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

PALM CITY — It almost seems silly that Mary Maloney would have to take two years of classes to earn her bachelor's degree.

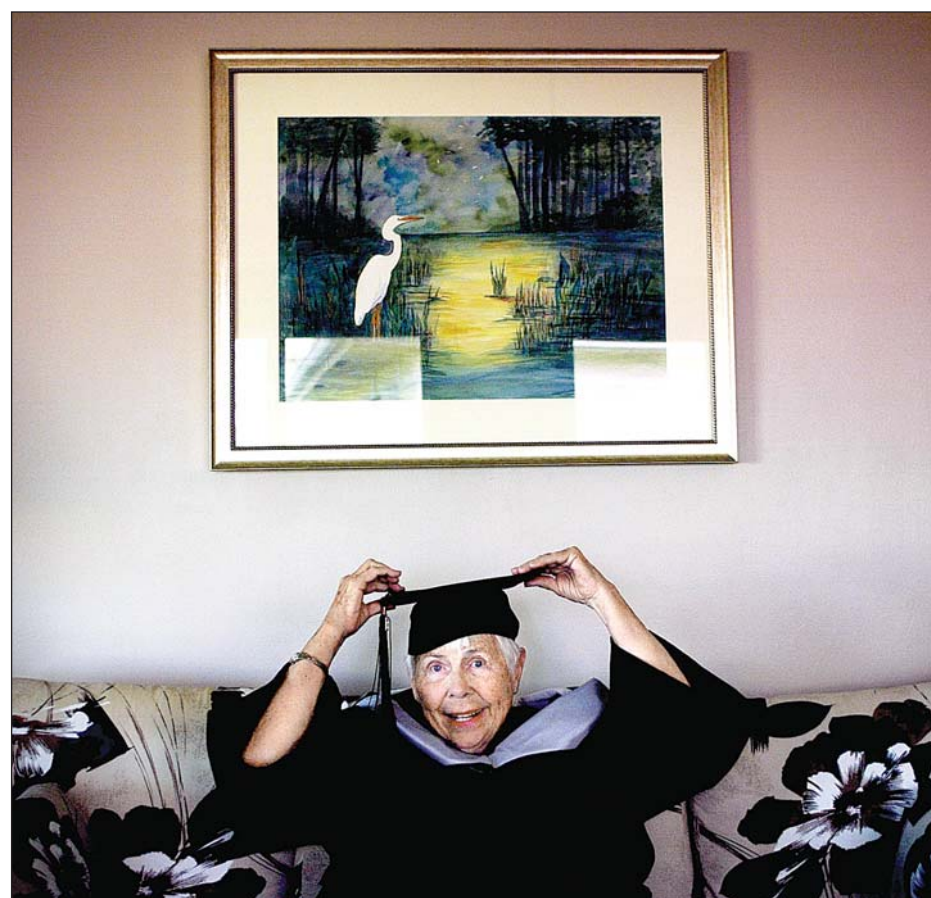
The Palm City woman turns 80 this summer. She raised 10 healthy and well-adjusted children, then entered the rat race and worked for 20 years.

She married a World War II veteran and celebrated 50 years of marriage in 2000, just months before her husband died from heart problems.

So after a lifetime of experience — she gave birth to five boys and five girls within 14 years before helping keep track of 45 lawyers as a secretary in New Jersey — shouldn't Florida universities be lining up with honorary degrees for Maloney?

Maybe.

But for this child of the Great Depression, who effortlessly rattles off a lengthy list of ways her life has been blessed, nothing is taken for granted and hard work is often its own re-



ward.

"My last class was philosophy," said Maloney, who will graduate Friday with a bachelor's degree in behavioral science from Barry University's

See DEGREE, 11A ▶

graduate Friday with a bachelor's degree in behavioral science from Barry University's School of Adult and Continuing Education in Port St. Lucie.

ERIK LUNSFORD/Staff Photographer

Adoptive parents sue over twins' ills

They say they were lied to about their sons' health from the start.

By JANE MUSGRAVE
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

WEST PALM BEACH — Having seen more than his share of hospitals and doctors when he and his wife struggled unsuccessfully to have children, Robert Albert said he was emphatic in one demand to an adoption agency.

"We wanted a child who was healthy, one that would develop normally," he said of his one inflexible request.

So when officials at Adoptions With Love called with the news that Albert and his wife, Renee, could adopt twin boys who showed no signs of ill health, the Boston-area couple jumped on a plane and came to West Palm Beach to take home what they believed were the children of their dreams.

Nearly two years later, a doctor they consulted when one of the boys still wasn't walking said the twins were doomed from the start.

See ADOPTIONS, 4A ▶

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Weather:
Partly sunny
and storms.
High 85,
low 72.
FORECAST ON
BACK PAGE
OF SPORTS

DEAR ABBY	2E	HOROSCOPE	2E
BUSINESS	1D	LOTTERY	2A
CLASSIFIED	1F	PEOPLE	12A
COMICS	8E	SCORES	10C
CROSSWORD	7E	STOCKS	3D
CROSSWORD	7F	THEATERS	5E
DEATHS	6B	TV LISTINGS	7E
EDITORIALS	14A	WEATHER	12C

**BRAVES
10
MARLINS
2**

Prepare for bird flu
Stacey Singer's Plasmid blog tells why it's good to stockpile food and water.
PalmBeachPost.com/blogs

Bush's poll numbers plunge to new lows
Gas prices and the war in Iraq shrink the president's support. **Story, 6A**

Liberti's exit could open doors for western areas
Some see it as a chance for the communities to have a voice on the city commission. **Local, 1B**

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