WINING & DINING
A Charleston celebration. Food, 1D

Feuding Americans come up short
Hometown hero races past bitter skating rivals. **Sports, 1C**

torino 2006

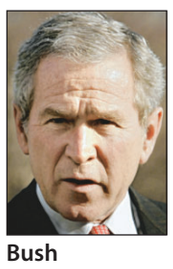
The Post and Courier

THE SOUTH'S OLDEST DAILY NEWSPAPER

February 22, 2006 • Charleston • North Charleston, S.C. **WEDNESDAY** Founded 1803 ★★ 50 cents

Briefly

Bush endorses takeover of ports, threatens veto



Bush

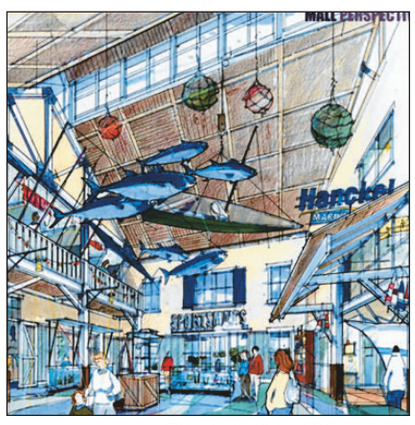
President Bush backed the takeover of shipping operations at six major U.S. ports by a state-owned business in the United Arab Emirates, and said he would veto any efforts in Congress to block the agreement. **3A**

Egypt breaks from U.S. on aid to Palestinians

Egypt's foreign minister said it would be premature to cut off aid to the Palestinian government, even though the next Palestinian prime minister has refused to respond to a demand from the Palestinian president to adhere to interim peace deals with Israel. **3A**

Government predicts ever-rising health costs

Analysts foresee a total health care bill of more than $4 trillion by 2015, of which half will be paid by the government, with the rest coming from consumers. Consumption and investment are expected to drive the costs. **3A**



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An architect's rendering shows plans for the interior of the Sportsman's Island retail center.

'Sportsman's Island' to target area's boaters

The owner of Scout Boats in Summerville is building a three-level center to house multiple stores selling fishing, boating, camping and water sports gear, all on a 7.7-acre property off Interstate 526. He expects the retail-service center to open by December. **7B**

Stocks fall on strength of economic indicators

Wall Street tumbled on worries about future interest rate increases after a Fed reading of the economy was almost twice as high as expected. The Dow fell 46.26 to 11,069.06, while the Nasdaq was down 19.40 to 2,262.96 **7B**

Today's outlook
Mostly cloudy; showers around. High 70. Low 52. 5-day forecast, **12B**.

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Alligatorzilla caught — by camera

Author snaps photos of giant bull gator seen by ferry operator on Bull's Island

BY CHRIS DIXON
The Post and Courier

Armed with only a digital camera, Bob Raynor sailed out to Bull's Island last Friday to hunt for Alligatorzilla.

Aided by gorgeous sunny weather, the 55-year-old author of the book "Exploring Bull Island" hiked north to Jack's Creek. There, he found a huge bull alligator that he had never seen in his many expeditions through the island's swamps and forests.

Raynor said he had only become aware of Alligatorzilla when The Post and Courier ran an article citing Bull's Island Ferry operator Chris Crolley's assertion that the reptile might be a state record. While a January excursion yielded no Alligatorzilla, Crolley bravely slogged out to stake a four-foot measuring stick into the ground on the bank where the animal typically soaks in the sun.

"I went up on the berm," Raynor said, "and looked straight across the water at a big gator. I thought that was him, but at that point, I looked over to the right and saw the real one. There was no doubt."

Raynor then fired off a number of pictures of the mammoth reptile and settled down for lunch. A poorly swallowed piece of sandwich led to a

Please see **GATOR,** Page 12A

BOB RAYNOR

Alligatorzilla was photographed by author Bob Raynor Friday at Jack's Creek on the northern end of Bull's Island. Raynor estimated the gator to be as long as 17 feet, but Cape Romain Wildlife Refuge manager Matt Connolly said he thought it was a maximum of 15 feet. The current state record is 13 feet 5.5 inches.

A cut above

WADE SPEES/STAFF

Working 175-feet above the Cooper River on Tuesday, a steelworker cuts steel on the Silas N. Pearman Bridge to help separate a 380-foot-long, 585-ton section over the river so it can be lowered onto a barge today. Story, Page 1B.

Supreme Court to take on abortion

2003 federal ban on 'partial-birth' procedures at issue

BY CHARLES LANE
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court agreed Tuesday to decide whether a 2003 federal ban on the procedure that opponents call "partial-birth abortion" is constitutional, setting the stage for its most significant ruling on abortion rights in almost 15 years.

Roberts

Alito

Without comment or recorded dissent, the court granted the Bush administration's request to review a lower court's ruling striking down the law, which passed Congress overwhelmingly but has yet to be enforced.

The case will test the new balance of abortion opinion on a court whose membership now includes two Bush appointees, Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Samuel Alito. Given their conservative leanings and the court's past vote count on the issue, the federal ban's chances appear strong.

Arguing that an appeals court's invalidation of an act of Congress was worthy of the court's attention, the Bush administration persuaded the justices to take the case without one usual criterion for doing so, a division among lower courts. Since the first appeals court struck down

Please see **COURT,** Page 9A

Shooting victim slowly recovers

Teen recalls 2-month relationship with man charged in incident

BY JOHN CHAMBLISS
The Post and Courier

Shawn Washington doted on his 16-year-old girlfriend when they first started dating in December, often buying her clothes and shoes.

"We had fun together and laughed a lot," Gabriel Nelson said.

But early on, there were signs that the relationship wasn't going to work.

Washington, 20, never wanted Nelson to leave her home alone. Once, Nelson said, Washington pointed a gun at her, accusing her of liking one of his friends. As they dated, arguments over the telephone increased.

"After the first date, he was jealous," Nelson said. "He thought I was going to leave him."

Police said Washington fired a gunshot into Nelson's head Feb. 8 at a North Charleston hotel room after she ended their two-month relationship.

Gabriel Nelson

Two weeks ago, it was uncertain whether Nelson would live.

She has been in and out of the hospital. Over the weekend, doctors successfully removed a bullet from her skull at Medical University Hospital, said her mother, Erika Nelson.

When the teen will be able to return home and when she might be able to lead a normal life again is anyone's guess.

Before the operation, her swollen head hurt at night. She used Q-tips to clean fluid from her right ear. At home, she slept and watched movies and walked to the bathroom with the help of her mother. She continues to undergo physical and occupational therapy.

Last week, Nelson sat on the edge of her bed as she spoke about her emotional and physical struggles.

"I don't want to meet anyone else new," she said. "I don't want any serious relationships."

Erika Nelson said her daughter was a good student at Stall High School before she met Washington.

Nelson said she did everything to keep her daughter away from him.

Please see **RECOVER,** Page 12A

Household names

Some of the more than 100 online retailers that feature Webloyalty offers at checkout:

- American Greetings
- Chadwick's
- Classmates.com
- Drugstore.com
- EB Games.com
- Fandango
- FTD
- Lane Bryant Catalog
- MovieTickets.com
- Petco
- Priceline

– SOURCE: Webloyalty.com Inc.

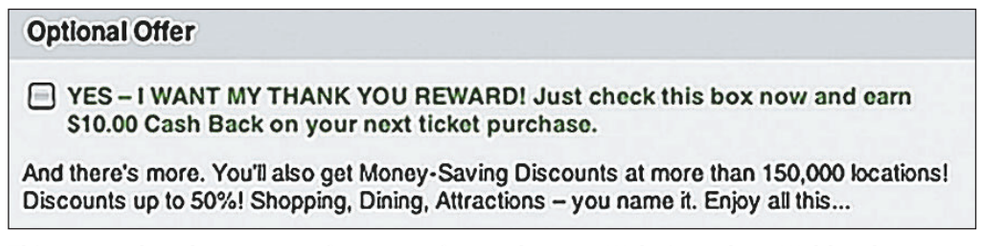
Third-party charges surprise online shoppers

BY KYLE STOCK
The Post and Courier

Who doesn't want $10 off their next purchase or a chance for huge savings on airline tickets?

Some of the biggest online retailers are letting third-party companies sweeten their deals at checkout, trading their customers' credit card numbers for 50 cents to $2 per transaction. The practice is legal, and lucrative, but it's leaving some consumers outraged as they discover small charges on their accounts from companies they've never heard of.

When customers call about the transactions, they learn that they unsuspectingly enrolled in a membership club while ordering something online, typically from big-name businesses including Priceline, Fandango and Petco.



This screen shot shows a page from one of more than 100 Web sites where Webloyalty.com offers shoppers a membership providing rebates, ID protection and discount clearinghouses . Many who sign up are unaware they will be automatically billed for monthly fees.

Many of the complaints popping up on Web sites and message boards point to Webloyalty.com Inc., a Connecticut-based company that is majority-owned by General Atlantic LLC, a private equity firm also based in Connecticut.

Three of Webloyalty's top executives have MBAs from Harvard University. In 2004 it collected $86 million from some of the country's

Please see **ONLINE,** Page 9A

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CYAN-AOOO MAGENTA-OAOO YELLOW-OOAO BLACK