



Thunderstorms
High 72, low 56
Details, 17A

THE STATE NEWSPAPER

INSIDE



Why we in W.Va. pay more for gas

Location, transportation, population and taxation are major factors behind why West Virginians pay more per gallon of gas than 34 other states, an industry official, two professors who study gas-price trends, and others say.

CONSUMER INSIGHT, 1D

3,000 casualties feared in N. Korea

Two fuel trains collide at a North Korean railroad station near the Chinese border, igniting a deafening explosion that rains debris for more than 10 miles around, South Korean media reports.

NEWS, 13A

Party switchers busy this year?

Is it "election psychosis" or something else? Fears that Republicans are switching sides to vote against the best candidates in the Democratic primary don't seem to be panning out, according to a survey of county clerks.

TODAY, 1C

COMING SUNDAY

Community



McCoy and Anderson

FOR NEARLY 50 years, Mary Jane Anderson and Leon McCoy have taught and coached Winfield High School students. Read about them and the ups and downs of the League of Women Voters, on the Community page, in this weekend's

Sunday Gazette-Mail

U.S. war dead

Iraq: 706
Afghanistan: 116

Source: Department of Defense

Story, 6A

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Weirton Steel sale OK'd

Judge says \$237 million deal is only way to protect workers

By Vicki Smith
The Associated Press

WHEELING — A federal bankruptcy judge approved the \$237 million sale of Weirton Steel Corp. to Ohio's International Steel Group on Thursday, saying he was convinced the company can no longer survive on its own.

Although the sale is painful to many parties, it's the only alternative to secure the future of the mill and its 3,000 employees, U.S. Bankruptcy Judge L. Edward Friend II said.

Friend rejected a creditors group's arguments that ISG's offer was too low and that the compressed time line for the auction made it impossible for

third parties to participate.

After considering experts' contrasting views of Weirton's worth, Friend set the mill's value at \$204 million and declared ISG's offer fair and reasonable.

He also said ISG dealt with Weirton in good faith and that other prospective bidders had equal access to the company, its records and its union.

Friend said he studied the company's history and was stunned to discover that as of Dec. 31, 2003, it had a negative accumulated surplus of \$1.7 billion. That means since 1984, when employees bought the company from its previous owner, Weirton has lost an average \$100 million per year.

"This company cannot stand

alone," the judge said. "It can't run on \$100 million losses per year."

"It hasn't worked in the last 20 years. It won't work in the next 20."

Weirton Chief Executive Officer D. Leonard Wise said he was relieved and pleased by the news.

Please see **SALE, 17A**

Woman arrested after husband shot



Gazette photo by CHRIS DORST

Charleston police investigator Aaron James photographs the crime scene where a shooting on Livingston Avenue left a West Side man in critical condition and his wife jailed on a charge of malicious wounding.

Court records show couple had history of domestic violence, protective orders

"There was no remorse at all. She had a beer bottle in one hand and was dancing in the street."

Doug Jones, witness

By Rick Steelhammer
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A 27-year-old Charleston woman was charged with malicious wounding Thursday, after she allegedly shot her husband several times as he worked on his car outside the couple's West Side home.

Police said that when officers arrived at the scene of the midday shooting, Crystal

Renee Patterson of 1408 Livingston Ave. was holding a handgun and standing over her 38-year-old husband, Charles Edward Patterson, as he lay bleeding on the pavement.

She was taken into custody without incident, and her husband was transported to CAMC General Hospital, where he was listed in critical condition.

"The evidence indicates there was a domestic dispute earlier in the morning, and

the suspect went to another location, retrieved a handgun, and returned to Livingston Avenue, where the victim was working on his car," said Sgt. Carl Hammonds of the Charleston Police Department.

Court records indicate that Crystal Renee Patterson filed two domestic-violence petitions against Charles Patterson last year, one

Please see **SHOOTING, 17A**

Baathists to be invited back

U.S. seeks help in Iraq from some ex-leaders

By Barry Schweid
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Thousands of Iraqis who swore allegiance to Saddam Hussein's political party might be getting jobs under the U.S.-led coalition in Baghdad as the Bush administration — struggling to put down resistance — undertakes a major shift in policy.

Only alleged criminals, expected to face trials, will remain automatically excluded, along with the top four levels of Saddam's Baath Party and the three most senior levels of ministries of the fallen leader's government, an official of the U.S.-led coalition said in a telephone interview from Baghdad.

But other Iraqis who have been banned, including 14,000 discharged school teachers, will get their jobs back if they can make the case that they were party members in name only, said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

In addition, the process of appealing disqualifications will be speeded up so Iraqis can get rulings more quickly, the official said.

At the same time, Iraqis who served in Saddam's army, includ-

Please see **IRAQ, 17A**



AP photo

U.S. Marines at a military checkpoint outside Fallujah, Iraq, set up concertina wire to block residents from returning to the city Thursday.

Earlier disputes preceded stabbing, SJMS official says

By Eric Eyre
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A day after a 14-year-old Charleston boy allegedly stabbed a student at Stonewall Jackson Middle School, Kanawha County schools officials said the teenagers had previous arguments that included "verbal taunting" and "name-calling."

"It really escalated over the past two or three days," said Carol Thom, principal at the middle school. "There had been perceived slights."

Dorian Brown, an eighth-grader at Stonewall, was in satisfactory condition Thursday after undergoing surgery to repair a 2-inch knife wound in his back. He is expected to be released from the hospital in five to 10 days, Thom said.

"They expect a full recovery," she said. "He came through surgery in great shape."

Troy White was arrested and charged with malicious wounding Wednesday after police said White stabbed Brown in the back in an alley behind the middle school.

White had been expelled from Horace Mann Middle School for vandalism, fighting and repeatedly breaking school rules, and was receiving home-

bound instruction.

Kanawha school officials at first believed the teens solely fought over a girl at school. But the feud had been brewing for days, Thom said.

Two of White's cousins attend Stonewall, and they also had exchanged derogatory words with Brown, school officials said.

"There was a history to this," said Melanie Vickers, an assistant superintendent who's investigating the incident. "There are more complications to it. There were other altercations. Words were exchanged."

Vickers and Thom praised teachers for restoring calm to the school. The middle school went into "lock down" until police arrested White on Wednesday afternoon.

After the final bell, teachers patrolled Stonewall's grounds. They also stood outside Thursday morning when buses arrived.

"It was handled superbly," Vickers said. "Everyone was doing what they're supposed to do. Safety is our No. 1 priority at this point in time."

School officials don't plan to bolster security at Stonewall. They've ruled out putting a

Please see **STABBING, 17A**