

Snakes nabbed for store

(AP) — Snakes began disappearing from their locked cages at the Bronx Zoo and the keepers were puzzled. When one disappeared and then reappeared in its cage three days later, the keepers were dumbfounded.

The discovery of some unusual snakes at a local pet shop, however, uncoiled the mystery and led to the arrest of a teenage snake fancier and his friend who police say turned their hobby into snake snaring-for-profit.

The mastermind of the scheme was a 15-year-old who slithered into the snake house through an air-conditioning duct armed with a zoology book to determine which of the reptiles were poisonous, said Bronx Dist. Atty. Mario Merola.

"This youngster, a snake fancier, was able to roam through the snake house at will after hours, making repeated visits to the place with the snakes and to steal them," said Merola.

The youth, who was not identified because of his age, was arrested with his alleged accomplice, Steven Gonzales, 17, of the Bronx.

On one occasion, Merola said, the younger boy opened the cage of a spitting cobra but slammed the glass panel shut just as the snake shot a jet of venom at him.

"One night," Merola continued, "the boy took home a snake to play with it. He fed it a rat and the snake became ill. Afraid that it would die, he returned it to its cage. You can imagine how upset the investigators were when the missing snake reappeared in its locked cage a couple of days after it disappeared."

Half of the 30 snakes stolen over a three-month period were recovered.

Viet babies pronounced non unique

(AP) — A pediatrics group says the 1,900 Vietnamese orphans brought to the United States suffer from many of the same illnesses afflicting American children, but undernourishment makes their cases more severe.

Dr. Henry Seidel of Baltimore, Md., said in an interview Monday that a survey of the orphans has disclosed no diseases which would require quarantine and none which was unique or unusual.

Seidel is the chairman of a task force named by the American Academy of Pediatrics to determine if the Vietnamese children were unhealthy or were bringing to this country diseases which might endanger American children.

Seidel said a few cases of meningitis were reported, but of the type which can be treated successfully. He also cautioned that some of the children have hepatitis and their adoptive parents need to exercise care to be sure the disease — a liver infection — is not spread.

Among other chronic diseases noted were intestinal parasites and noncontagious chronic lung disease, he said. Few of the children required hospitalization.

House ends pupil grants for college

AUSTIN, Tex. (AP) — House budget writers voted Tuesday to eliminate funds for the controversial tuition equalization grants program. They also eliminated \$100 million recommended for special education.

The House Appropriations Committee voted 7-6 — with eight absent — to eliminate the \$23 million recommended by the Legislative Budget Board for the tuition equalization grants TEG.

"I am convinced the whole program is unconstitutional," said Rep. Jim Kaster, D-El Paso, who made the anti-TEG motion.

TEG provides up to \$600 a year to help students at private colleges pay their tuition, which runs much higher than the \$50 a semester at state colleges.

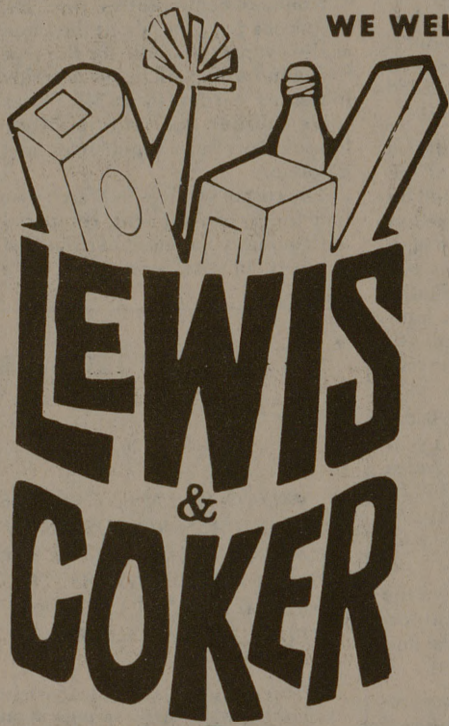
Church-state separation aside, Kaster said he believes it violates a state constitutional provision against making grants of state funds to individuals.

He acknowledged the possibility that the committee will reverse its decision and restore at least part of the money, perhaps reducing the maximum grant to \$500 a year.

The committee chopped the recommended funding for special education for handicapped pupils from \$520 million to \$420 million over the next two years.

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