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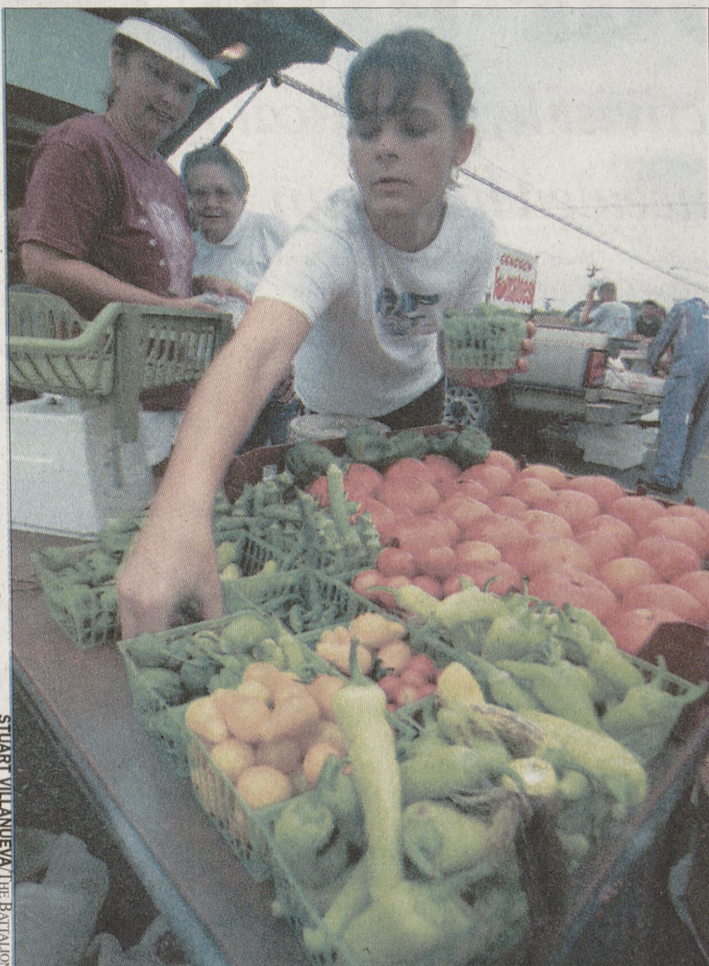
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Monday, June 12, 2000

# NEWS

THE BATTALION

## Ripe for the picking



Linda Roesler, 14, of Cook's Point arranges home grown vegetables at a farmer's market in Bryan on Saturday. Roesler and her family along with many local farmers sell their produce at these markets each week.

## Gas prices up nine cents in three weeks

CAMARILLO, Calif. (AP) — Gasoline prices climbed 8.82 cents a gallon in the past three weeks as a new kind of reformulated gas made its way to the pumps, giving some cities an average price of more than \$2 a gallon.

High crude oil prices, rising demand and new antimog regulations affecting 17 metropolitan areas pushed the nationwide average cost to \$1.6723 a gallon Friday, analyst Tritelby Lundberg said Sunday.

That compares to the May 19 Lundberg Survey of 10,000 stations nationwide that found a national average of \$1.5841.

"We are in a nightmare of patchwork-quilt environmental regulations which wreak havoc with gasoline supply and price stability," Lundberg said. "The wide variety of regulations affecting formulas has created wide price disparities around the country and made distribution of gasoline more problematic."

Metropolitan areas with some of the worst air pollution in the nation were required by June 1 to start using a new kind of gas that is designed to preserve air quality.

Dealers in the Midwest, where many cities use a kind of reformulated gas that is blended with the corn derivative ethanol, are paying 26 cents more at wholesale, Lundberg

said. Consequently, some retailers have sacrificed profit margins to remain competitive.

In Chicago, one of the 17 metropolitan areas affected by the new regulations, the average price for a gallon of regular was \$2.13, Lundberg said. That price marks the first time on record that a city's overall average price for gas has topped \$2, she said.

By contrast, Phoenix came in with the lowest average price with a gallon of self-serve regular costing \$1.93, Lundberg predicted. Prices might drop slightly in coming weeks, especially if the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) decides to increase production this month. But the price will come near last year's weighted average on June 11 of \$1.99.

Although the latest prices are to be the highest on record, they are actually lower than gas prices peaked in 1981, Lundberg said. The March 1981 national average price, adjusted for inflation, was \$2.66, she said.

The national average price for gasoline, including taxes, at the pumps on Friday was \$1.63 for regular, \$1.72 for mid-grade and \$1.81 for premium.

At full-service pumps, the average was \$1.93 for regular, \$2.02 for mid-grade and \$2.09 for premium.

## N.C. Barbers giving away free condoms at shop

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — Atop a candy vending machine in Tom Jacobs' barber shop sits a glass jar with freebies for customers. But it's not filled with free combs or candy.

Jacobs is giving away condoms. Customers at LaPorsha's Hair Studio are invited to take as many as they need — part of a program adopted by hairstylists in five North Carolina counties to combat AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases among blacks.

"The barber shop is the kind of place where the guys come in and talk about what's really happening in their lives," said Jimmy Wiggins, a LaPorsha's customer.

"It's not like church where you hold back a bit. We really let it all hang out here."

Jacobs said that is why he joined the program. "There's some people who won't listen. They just want to come in and talk about how many 15-year-olds they knocked up," he said. "I want them to know, 'If you're doing it, be careful.'"

The nearly 10-year-old Positive Connections program, which operates only in North Carolina, aims to train 100 barbers and beauticians in the Charlotte

area over the next year. If all goes as planned, they would counsel 300 men and women each week and distribute 1,000 condoms and pamphlets a week.

**"I just don't want someone coming to me in 10 years saying, 'Why didn't you tell me about this?'"**

— Tom Jacobs' barber

Statistics from the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show blacks, who make up 12 percent of the U.S. population, represent 37 percent of the AIDS cases; the CDC estimates one in 50 black men and one in 160 black women are infected with HIV, the virus that leads to AIDS.

In Mecklenburg County, there were 157 cases last

year, and 133 were black. Of the county's 1,900 cases — the precursor of AIDS — 1,549 were blacks. Jacobs and about two dozen black barbers and hair stylists attended recent training sessions counseling customers about prevention and safe sex. Jacobs put down his scissors and came to his TV and hit the play button on a video cassette recorder.

As the narrator recited the grim statistics, Jacobs bantered in the shop fell to a whisper.

Besides offering free condoms, Jacobs even plays a 13-minute video on the HIV/AIDS epidemic featuring President Clinton and U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher.

Jacobs, 49, said before he joined the program he wondered whether all the safe sex talk would drive away customers.

"If I've lost some business, no one said anything to me about it," he said. "I just don't want someone coming to me in 10 years saying, 'Why didn't you tell me about this?'"

## Assad nominated for president of Syria

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — Bashar Assad, son of the late Syrian leader, was appointed commander of the armed forces Sunday, another indication he will succeed his father as president in a country where most people have known no other ruler.

Hafez Assad's strong-willed, strong-arm stewardship ended a series of coups that followed independence from France in 1946. President Bashar Assad, who died Saturday, was the previous commander. The ruling Baath Party also unanimously nominated Bashar Assad as the only candidate for president.

In anointing Bashar Assad, the hierarchy is opting for a smooth, stable transition — instead of the uncertainty and violence that characterized power changes in Syria before Hafez Assad took over in a bloodless coup in 1970.

Hafez Assad's strong-willed, strong-arm stewardship ended a series of coups that followed independence from France in 1946.

It remains to be seen whether Bashar Assad, who has held no major political office, will be tough and canny enough to hold onto the power he is inheriting.

But the British-educated eye doctor was a favorite with ordinary Syrians, many of whom seemed incapable of imagining their country without an Assad at the helm.

Abdel-Halim Khaddam, one of two vice presidents, declared as law Sunday a constitutional change that parliament made Saturday, lowering the minimum age for president from 40 to 34. Bashar is 34.

It had long been clear Hafez Assad was grooming his son to rule after him. The political apparatus the auto-

cratic Assad, 69, left behind began preparing to carry out those wishes soon after he died.

All that is left is for the rubber-stamp parliament, which is scheduled to meet June 25, to approve the nomination and for elections to be held. Hafez Assad routinely ran as the only candidate in presidential elections, and just as routinely recorded "yes" votes of close to 100 percent.

"We have full confidence in Bashar



**Like father, like son**  
Bashar Assad is likely to become the next president of Syria after his father's death. This could be the first "republican dynasty" created in the Middle East by fathers grooming their sons to assume that political power stays in the family. Here is a look at some Arab leaders who have helped their sons to positions of political power.

<b>Ahmed Ali Abdullah Saleh</b> , Yemeni President Sons: Ahmed	<b>Hoari Mubarak</b> , Egyptian President Sons: Gamal
<b>Saddam Hussein</b> , Iraqi President Sons: Oudai and Qusai	<b>Muammar Gaddafi</b> , Libyan Leader Sons: Saif al-Islam and Al-Saadi

• Oudai was appointed head of Chirpik Committee, Journalist Syndicate and Writers' and Artists' Union. Qusai is in charge of the Republican guard.  
• Both sons have assumed larger public roles, standing in for their father at public occasions.

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"Hafez Assad's successor will inherit a country with the diseases that are almost typical in this region: Corruption, a struggling economy in need of modernization and liberalization, and the challenges of democratization lying ahead," it said.

The "Lion of Damascus" — Assad means lion in Arabic — was one of the region's longest-serving leaders and seen as key to a comprehensive Israeli-Arab peace settlement.

He tried to rally his fellow Arabs to counter what he saw as Israeli influence in the Middle East, only to see them one by one enter peace negotiations or sign treaties with the Jewish state.

Assad's death could slow already stalled Israeli-Syrian peace talks. Though Assad resumed talks with the Israelis last year after a hiatus of nearly four years, the talks were suspended in January when Syria insisted Israel commit to returning to pre-war 1967 borders.

Assad's funeral ceremonies will stretch from the capital, Damascus, to his home village of Qardaha, 125 miles northwest.

## News in Brief Strong earthquake hits central Taiwan

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — A 6.7 magnitude earthquake shook central Taiwan Sunday, causing rock slides and jarring more than 20 people, and seismologists said. No deaths were reported.

The quake, with a preliminary magnitude of 6.7, was centered 6 miles north of Mount Yu, Taiwan's highest mountain, about 180 miles from the capital, Taipei, the Central Weather Bureau said.

The U.S. Geological Survey in Denver, Colo., which uses a different scale than the Central Weather Bureau, measured the quake at 6.2.

Taiwan's Disaster Relief Center said more than 20 people were injured when it was thrown from its cradle by the quake.

The quake was followed by aftershocks with magnitudes of 4.5 and 5, the Central Weather Bureau said.

All the quakes, including the magnitude 6.7, were considered aftershocks of a magnitude 7.3 earthquake that struck the region in September, killing 2,400 people and destroying thousands of homes.

Seismologists at the bureau said it is not unusual for aftershocks of a major earthquake to continue for a year or more.