

Thursday, February 19, 2004

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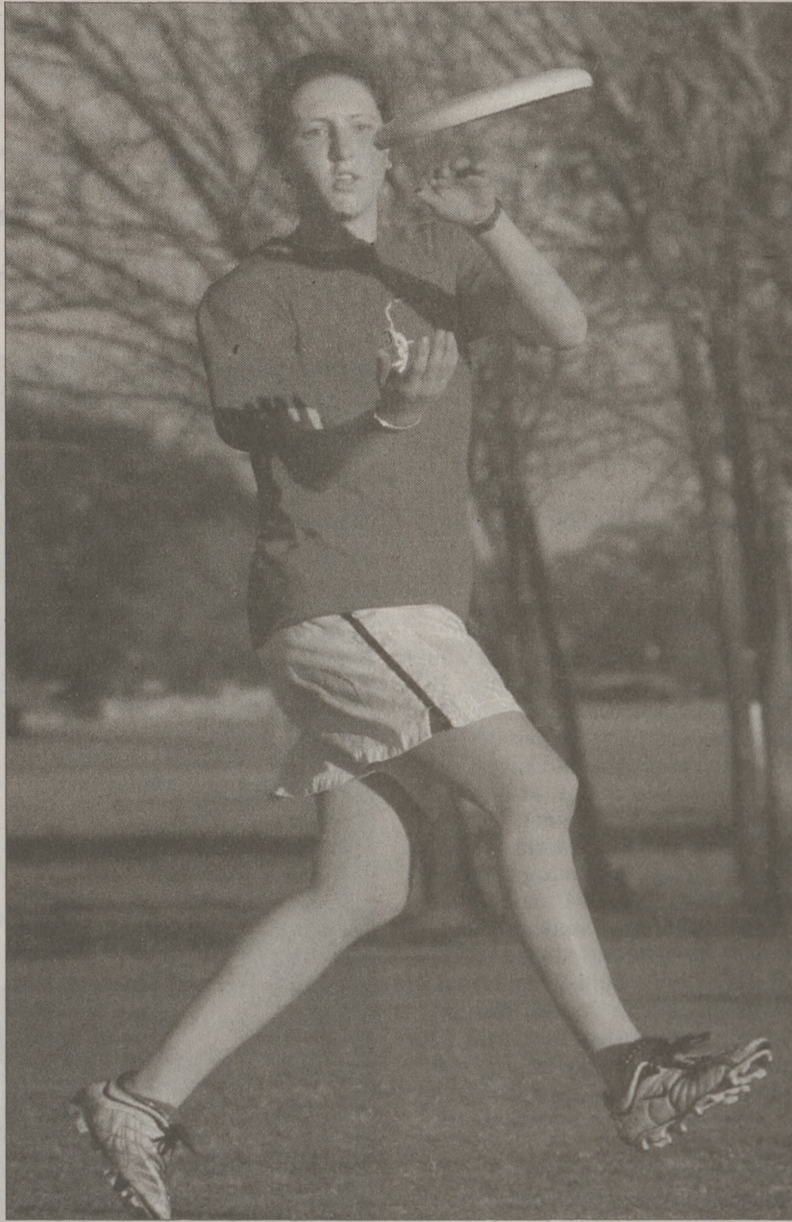
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Nice catch



Evan O'Connell • THE BATTALION

Sophomore business major **Shannon McLaughlin** catches a Frisbee at practice Tuesday afternoon at the polo fields. **McLaughlin** is a member of the Ultimate Frisbee club team, which is playing in a tournament this weekend in Baton Rouge, La.

How low can the St. Louis murder rate go?

By Jim Suhr
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ST. LOUIS — In a city that averaged 145 killings a year over the past decade, Police Chief Joe Mokwa scribbled "99" on a scrap of paper and gave it to the head of the homicide unit, Harry Hegger. As Mokwa recalls it, Hegger gulped.

Neither man really believed keeping slayings in 2003 below 100 was possible.

By year's end, St. Louis had done better than that. Far better. The death toll was 69, matching the city's lowest total since 1962, which was also the last time St. Louis had fewer than 100 murders.

"We're seeing tangible results, and it's pleasing. We're sending a message that we're not going to tolerate that kind of behavior anymore," said Mayor Francis Slay.

How did St. Louis meet the goal set in 2002? Police, prosecutors and others say the chief explanation is that they put the squeeze on the city's most violent neighborhoods.

During the past couple of years, the city has added 100 police officers. Stepped-up patrols concentrated on the dozen neighborhoods that once accounted for half of the city's homicides. From there, police systematically zeroed in on specific streets and troublemakers.

Police now keep tabs on people they consider troublemakers. Authorities have cracked down on outstanding warrants to get "the worst of the worst" off the streets. And prosecutors have pressed for and gotten stiff sentences that put chronic bad guys behind bars.

"I don't think it correlated to more or less arrests, just smarter ones," said Jennifer Joyce, the city's prosecutor.

Some also credit state-of-the-art hospitals with saving the lives of victims who years earlier might have died of their wounds.

St. Louis' homicide toll has declined more than 60 percent in the past two years. Last year's total was a sharp drop-off from 113 in 2002, 149 in 2001 and 123 the year before that. It was a 74 percent decline from St. Louis' all-time high of 267 in 1993, when the city's homicide rate was more than eight times the national one.

Scientists struggle for new test that doesn't require killing cows

By Nicholas K. Geranios
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SPOKANE, Wash. — When the nation's first case of mad cow disease was discovered on a Washington farm, it took the slaughter of more than 700 healthy cattle to prove the disease had not spread.

That's because there's no test for mad cow that can be done on live animals, and there may not be one for some time.

"I don't know how far away we are," said Don Knowles, who runs a U.S. Department of Agriculture laboratory in Pullman that is working jointly with Washington State University scientists to develop such a test.

"Data and announcements are coming out all the time," Knowles said. "At this moment, none of these tests has enough validation data behind them."

Being able to diagnose an infection quickly could help keep contaminated beef out of the food chain and also cut the economic loss that comes from slaughtering healthy animals, according to a 2003 report

by the National Research Council. The animals killed in Washington state, for example, would have been worth well over half a million dollars at market.

Mad cow disease is a public health concern because scientists believe humans who eat infected beef products can develop a brain-wasting disease called variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, which has killed 153 people worldwide.

Quick detection also could prevent contaminated human blood from entering the blood supply, the report said.

The misshapen proteins — called prions — thought to cause mad cow disease concentrate in the brain and central nervous system, and the best test for the disease involves killing the animal and analyzing a cross section of its brain.

Finding a test on living animals should be a top priority, but it does not appear to be imminent, according to the NRC report.

"Major breakthroughs are needed to achieve the levels of sensitivity and specificity required to test live animal and human tissues," the report said.

Scientists are following a theory that pri-

ons may move through the blood supply and are looking for a way to detect them there. Knowles said. They are also looking for a genetic marker that would reveal when prions are present, he said.

The Pullman researchers were the first to develop a test to detect a similar disease in sheep called scrapie, said Charlie Powell, a spokesman for the university's College of Veterinary Medicine.

That was the first and only test that can detect the class of diseases known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies — which includes mad cow disease — in living animals, Knowles said. But that test does not work on cattle, he said.

The lab also was heavily involved in creating the most widely used test to detect mad cow disease after an animal is killed. Knowles said.

Testing capabilities assumed greater urgency when the nation's first case of mad cow disease was announced shortly before Christmas. An infected Holstein from Mahoning was slaughtered Dec. 9 and diagnosed with mad cow disease on Dec. 22. It is the only case ever found in the United States.

RELIGION IN BRIEF

Baptists end chaplain endorsement

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (AP) — A Southern Baptist Convention's North American Mission Board decided to no longer endorse women for military chaplain positions because the denomination reserves such pastoral roles to men only.

Despite that interpretation of the Bible, the Rev. Terry Fox said the Baptists "affirm women in other areas of chaplaincy."

The ruling will not affect the 20 female military chaplains (among about 400) already endorsed by the board, but women will not be included in the future.

"You have to be able to do all of the things your faith group requires of a clergy person," said board spokesman Martin King. "To our trustees, that means being a pastor."

Presbyterians want minister reinstated

CINCINNATI (AP) — A religious court reinstated the Rev. Stephen Van Kuiken, who was ousted from ministry in the Presbyterian Church (USA) for marrying same-sex couples.

Van Kuiken was removed as a clergyman and as pastor of Mount Auburn Presbyterian Church for defying an order from the regional Cincinnati Presbytery to stop participating in the ceremonies.

A synod judicial commission, which covers Ohio and Michigan, overturned that decision on a technicality. The commission said Van Kuiken was still appealing a lower court's order to stop performing gay marriages.

The case has to be resolved before the church can take further action, it said.

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