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Families Reel in Wake of Senseless Shootings

Two separate holiday weekend killings may both have involved victims who were mistakenly hit by gang members.

By RICHARD FAUSSET AND DANIEL HERNANDEZ
Times Staff Writers

Before Thanksgiving weekend was over, some of the very things two families had just given thanks for were gone — taken from them suddenly, in torrents of street violence.

The families of a 19-year-old college student and a 43-year-old

mother of three were reeling Sunday from the brutality of two separate drive-by shootings carried out by suspected gang members.

Nicole Williamson's parents were in their Carson home early Saturday morning when they heard the gunfire.



VICTIM: Nicole Williamson, 19, was a Harbor College student.

Her father walked outside and found Nicole bleeding to death in her car, where she had been listening to music with a friend.

A criminology student, Williamson had been returning to her old high school to help teach routines to members of the flag squad.

"She was just a girl," said her father, Gregory Williamson.

In Hollywood, the husband and children of Rosalba Acosta were with her in the family truck Thursday when a bullet crashed through the rear windshield and struck her in the head. The 43-year-old stay-at-home mom had been driving her family home from a Thanksgiving dinner with friends.

Acosta had helped her husband start an auto repair business and was spending much of her time raising their youngest child, 3-year-old Andrew.

"Everything was working so good for us," said her husband, Ruiz.

According to police, none of the victims had gang ties: Acosta's slaying may



MOURNING: From left, Nicole Williamson's grandmother Ella Hall, cousin Soni Hawkins and aunt Dorothy Williams console each other at the victim's Carson home. The college student was shot while sitting in a parked car.

have been a case of mistaken identity, and Williamson's attackers were most likely gang members targeting a small group of boys who had been chatting with her on the street. The assailants also shot Williamson's friend Raynisha Bates in the torso multiple times. She is listed in stable condition.

The families, who had begun the

weekend counting their blessings, found themselves trying Sunday to deal with the brutality and foolishness of the anonymous attackers, all of whom remained at large.

"It was probably one of those gang members," said Ruiz Acosta. "They'll shoot anybody, you know?"

[See Deaths, Page B5]

Coast Homes Battle Brews

The state and the Dana Point condo owners it accuses of unfairly profiting from low-price purchases are headed for a court showdown.

By DAN WEIKEL
Times Staff Writer

A major court battle is developing between the California Coastal Commission and scores of property owners it suspects of abusing a state-mandated low-income-housing program along the Dana Point coast.

The case involves Niguel Beach Terrace, a bluff-top enclave of condominiums where more than 200 units were sold at steep discounts to qualified buyers in the early 1980s.

The controversy erupted last summer when the Coastal Commission, which oversees the project, issued 143 cease-and-desist orders to owners thought to have rented out or sold their condos at market value, violating the original purchase agreements.

Although the commission has retracted 38 of the cease-and-desist orders, most are headed toward a court showdown because many of the homeowners are now suing the commission in response. Those cases could turn on whether owners broke their end of the bargain or whether the Coastal Commission's handling of the low-income-housing program was so sloppy that owners were left in the dark.

Under terms of their original sales contracts, buyers were obligated to live in the condominiums for at least 20 years or sell their properties back to a public housing agency at a small profit, guaranteeing that the units would remain affordable for the next buyer. But some owners, Coastal Commission officials contend, rented out their units during summers for \$1,000 a week or more, exceeding the restrictions, while others leased their properties and moved out, a few to other states.

Some of the condos, the agency alleges, have been sold in the county's lucrative housing market at a substantial profit. Niguel Beach condos, just south of the posh Ritz-Carlton hotel in Dana Point, can fetch at least \$300,000 today — roughly five times the original sales price.

"These people don't seem to understand that they were subsidized to buy the units in the [See Condos, Page B4]

Deluges Would Threaten Reservoir

Runoff could pollute Silverwood Lake, officials fear. Straw is being used to stabilize slopes denuded by fires.

By JANET WILSON
Times Staff Writer

Racing to protect a reservoir that is a key link in Southern California's water supply, federal helicopter teams are dropping straw by the ton on slopes severely burned in last month's catastrophic wildfires around Silverwood Lake in the San Bernardino Mountains.

Officials want to stabilize the slopes before heavy winter rains, which could trigger large-scale erosion of ash, silt and potentially toxic compounds into the lake.

The reservoir provides drinking water for 12 million people, said Matt Mathes, spokesman for the U.S. Forest Service in California. "There are going to be a lot of mudslides, and a lot of sediment is going to wind up in the reservoir if we're not careful."

Heavy silt and ash could choke out wildlife and reduce the reservoir's capacity, officials said. Keeping remaining soil in place on denuded slopes would help, officials said. Slopes above some foothill neighborhoods in San Bernardino also are receiving aerial mulching.

"The timeline is to get it done before the first severe rainfall," said Ruth Wenstrom, a spokeswoman for the San Bernardino National Forest.

Pallets of rice straw are being trucked in from the Central Valley to two rough-hewn helipads. Rice straw is ideal, Wenstrom said, because it sops up moisture quickly. After the copters drop the bales, which can weigh as much as a ton, ground crews chop and spread the straw.

But mulching works only on slopes with inclines of less than 55%, meaning that many of the burned areas, which are the steepest and most erosion prone, can't be treated.

Still, the \$675,000 project is the priority in the \$2-million worth of emergency rehabilitation work being done since the Grand Prix and Old fires burned more than 185 square miles, including 4,500 acres of slopes that drain into the Mojave River, one fork of which drains into Silverwood Lake.

The lake, owned by the state Department of Water Resources, is a popular fishing and camping [See Silverwood, Page B5]



ANNE CUSACK Los Angeles Times

Who Needs New England in the Fall?

Walking their dog along Liberty Canyon Road in the Agoura Hills area, two people are surrounded by the colors of autumn, brought on partly by nighttime temperatures in the area that have dipped into the 40s.

Group Loses 'Indian' in Name, Not Spirit

YMCA youth program removes all references to Native Americans from activities and literature.

By STEPHANIE STASSEL
Times Staff Writer

When Molly Meyerson was in kindergarten and joined the YMCA's Indian Guides, her uncle gave her the Indian Princess patch he had received 20 years earlier when he and his daughter

participated in the program.

The tender moment demonstrated to Barry Meyerson, Molly's father, how the Indian Guides tradition had been passed from generation to generation. Many dads now in Indian Guides were involved as kids with their own fathers, shar-

ing campfires, carving Pinewood Derby cars and learning about American Indian culture.

But earlier this year, the YMCA's national organization decided to change the program's name to "Adventure Guides" and remove all references to Indians from guidebooks and activities. There would be no more meeting invitations in the shape of little tepees, no more petty cash called "wampum," and no

more greeting others with "How How."

While YMCA officials say the name change was not a reaction to Native Americans offended by the Indian theme, an executive board member for the American Indian Movement said hundreds of tribes, American Indian organizations and non-Indian organizations have taken a position that programs and sports [See Guides, Page B4]



Associated Press

HUNGRY: A bear opens a trash bin in Mammoth Lakes. Some city bears are twice their country cousins' size.

Urban Bears' Junk-Food Diet Is Making Them Fat

By JULIE CART
Times Staff Writer

A study published last week affirms that what's true for humans may also be true for bears: A junk-food diet and sedentary lifestyle lead to obesity and profound life changes.

A study of black bears in the Sierra Nevada found that those living in urban areas and gorging on garbage weigh as much as 30% more than bears in the wild and are about a third less active. Researchers concluded that they also are less likely to spend

time in winter dens, and that they change their sleeping habits to allow for nocturnal dumpster diving.

The study, co-written by Jon P. Beckmann and Joel Berger, is published in the current issue of Journal of Zoology. Beckmann said that, although city bears may be less active than their country cousins, they are not couch potatoes; they simply live closer to their food sources.

"I wouldn't say they are lazy; I would say they are opportunistic," Beckmann said by phone [See Bears, Page B5]

INSIDE

A Chance to Turn Their Lives Around

East Oakland's Men of Valor Academy offers troubled men a way to bounce back. **B3**

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IN SPORTS



Associated Press

Philadelphia Eagles' James Thrash (80) dives over the goal line.

Eagles Win Seventh Consecutive Game

Philadelphia Eagles defeat Carolina Panthers 25-16 on Sunday. **B6**