

NORTHEAST

Rodents are way of life for competitive 'rat' lady

ME DURHAM — Don't call anyone a dirty rat in June Harding's home. That would insult her pets.

"They're actually very clean," Harding said as two of her eight pet rats scurried up and down her arms and neck. "They can live in dirty surroundings, but they keep themselves very clean, and they're sweet and they're not vicious."

They're also intelligent and affectionate, she said. In her three years as a rat owner, Harding says that she never has been bitten.

She has eight Norway rats with names like Zorro, Velvet, Molli, Elizabeth and Little Bit. "They know their names, and they're like kids; they come when they want to," Harding said.

She breeds rats, but only sells to people who want them as pets. "I make sure they're not snake food," she said.

Harding attended the North American Rat and Mouse Club international competition in Hershey, Pa., with 200 other enthusiasts.

It was Harding's third convention, and she took her three male rats. They all placed in various categories. Peter Bear was recognized not for his size but his general good demeanor, placing fourth in the "pets" category.

A couple of years ago, Molli placed "Most Inquisitive" because, Harding said, "When they opened her cage, she ran right over to the judges."

Teenager who killed dog sent to obedience school

MA WORCESTER — A teenager who killed a dog with a bow and arrow is going to obedience school.

A judge ordered 18-year-old Brandy Bourn to perform 20 hours of community service — at a dog obedience school. He also must write an essay on the canine adventure novel, "The Call of the Wild."

Bourn admitted shooting Bailey, a black Labrador retriever and spaniel mix, in the chest last November, the Telegram & Gazette of Worcester has reported.

Judge Austin T. Philbin ordered Bourn to read the Jack London novel about a stolen dog taken to the Klondike to work as a sled dog, then submit an essay on the book to the court by Nov. 18.

Bourn also was ordered to pay the dog's owner \$400.

Vigil to honor gay student turns violent; arrests high

NY NEW YORK — A vigil to honor the gay Wyoming college student who was fatally beaten turned ugly, with dozens of protesters clashing with police along New York City's Fifth Avenue. About 100 people were arrested.

Police officers in riot gear and on horseback butted heads with the boisterous throng of 4,000 people.

"I was trampled by a horse ridden by a New York City police officer," said Ruth Finklestein, who was sitting on a sidewalk nursing a swollen ankle.

More than 95 demonstrators were arrested for disorderly conduct, and more arrests were expected, Deputy Police Commissioner Patrick Kelleher said.

Tapped out



The Associated Press

The Tapping Seniors perform at the legendary Apollo Theater in New York during an Apollo Elders Talent Showcase in this October 1997 file photo. In its heyday, the theater was a showcase for black entertainment. But desegregation, bigger venues and an economic downturn on 125th Street, Harlem's core, has turned the theater into a tourist stop.

Candidates get secretive in Senate race strategy

NY ALBANY — Republican Sen. Alfonse D'Amato and Democratic challenger Rep. Charles Schumer have turned secretive in their neck-and-neck Senate race in an effort to keep the other side in the dark.

When Schumer flew to Los Angeles for a fund-raiser with Hollywood moguls, his campaign kept the matter quiet.

Then, D'Amato picked up the endorsement of the Rev. Floyd Flake, a former Democratic congressman. The D'Amato campaign didn't put out any public notice until the event was over.

"As a tactical matter, it's good to not tip your hand," D'Amato campaign aide Robert Bellafiore said.

Schumer spokesman Howard Wolfson said, "They'll know exactly what we're doing and show up and potentially be disruptive or what have you."

Schumer's trip to Los Angeles is a case in point. When Republicans caught wind of it, they jumped into action.

"With his New York donors losing confidence, he's running to California in a mad dash for cash," the D'Amato camp said.

The secrecy strategy has become increasingly evident as the race tightened in the wake of Schumer's convincing Sept. 15 primary victory over Geraldine Ferraro and New York City Public Advocate Mark Green. Recent polls have generally shown the contest to be a dead heat.

MIDWEST

Gator sunning on road not fond of cop's shoes

MI MILFORD — The alligator could take being arrested — until he got a look at the police officer's shoes.

A truck driver spotted the 3-foot alligator sunning itself on a road northwest of Detroit. The trucker called police after taping the reptile's mouth shut.

Officer Tim Seguin and two other officers called Animal Control, then put the alligator in a patrol car. It tried to hide under the driver's seat, but one of the officers used a box and blankets from a nearby business to create a temporary home for it.

The alligator, believed to be an escaped or abandoned pet, snapped once before Animal Control arrived.

"He didn't like one of our officers," Seguin said. "It probably had something to do with his shoes. Maybe he thought he was looking at a relative."

Girl crawled under school bus; struck and killed

WI MERRILL — A 10-year-old girl who crawled underneath her school bus to get something was killed when the vehicle ran over her.

Montana Kleinschmidt was hit near

Merrill. The bus was headed for Midway Elementary School, where Kleinschmidt was a fifth-grader.

"It's a real tragedy for all of us: the family, the driver, the children, the staff and the community," said Frank Harrington, Merrill School District superintendent.

Authorities didn't know what the girl was trying to retrieve. A book, pencils and school bag remained under the bus for a time after the accident.

There were no charges pending against the bus driver. Harrington said the 61-year-old driver of the bus saw Kleinschmidt get on the bus, but she did not see her get off.

3 women show skeptics; bag moose with one shot

MN HOLDINGFORD — "The Moose Girls" got a trophy, 700 pounds of meat and the last laugh on their skeptical families.

Sharon Kostreba, Marie Maki and Dorothy Studer decided they'd see whether three resourceful women could bag a moose during the fall hunt.

Kostreba, 51, took a shooting lesson from her husband and scouted the terrain near Mead Lake in northeastern Minnesota with her friends. Her diligence paid off. A 1,400-pound bull ambled down a trail about 30 yards away, and she dropped it with one shot.

"It happened so quick, I didn't have time to be scared, really," she said. The women, now nicknamed "The Moose Girls," split the meat three ways.