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Today's classified advertising section starts on C11

THURSDAY, MAY 26, 2005

The Bakersfield Californian

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Legends in Bronze concert

Surprise!

Garth Brooks stunned the crowd of 7,000 at the Crystal Palace by hitting his knees and proposing to Trisha Yearwood Wednesday night

By DANIELLE C. BELTON
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Country music icon Garth Brooks proposed marriage to longtime girlfriend and music star Trisha Yearwood on stage Wednesday night.

The proposal was made in front of more than 7,000 screaming fans at the Legends In Bronze concert and dedication at Buck Owens' Crystal Palace.

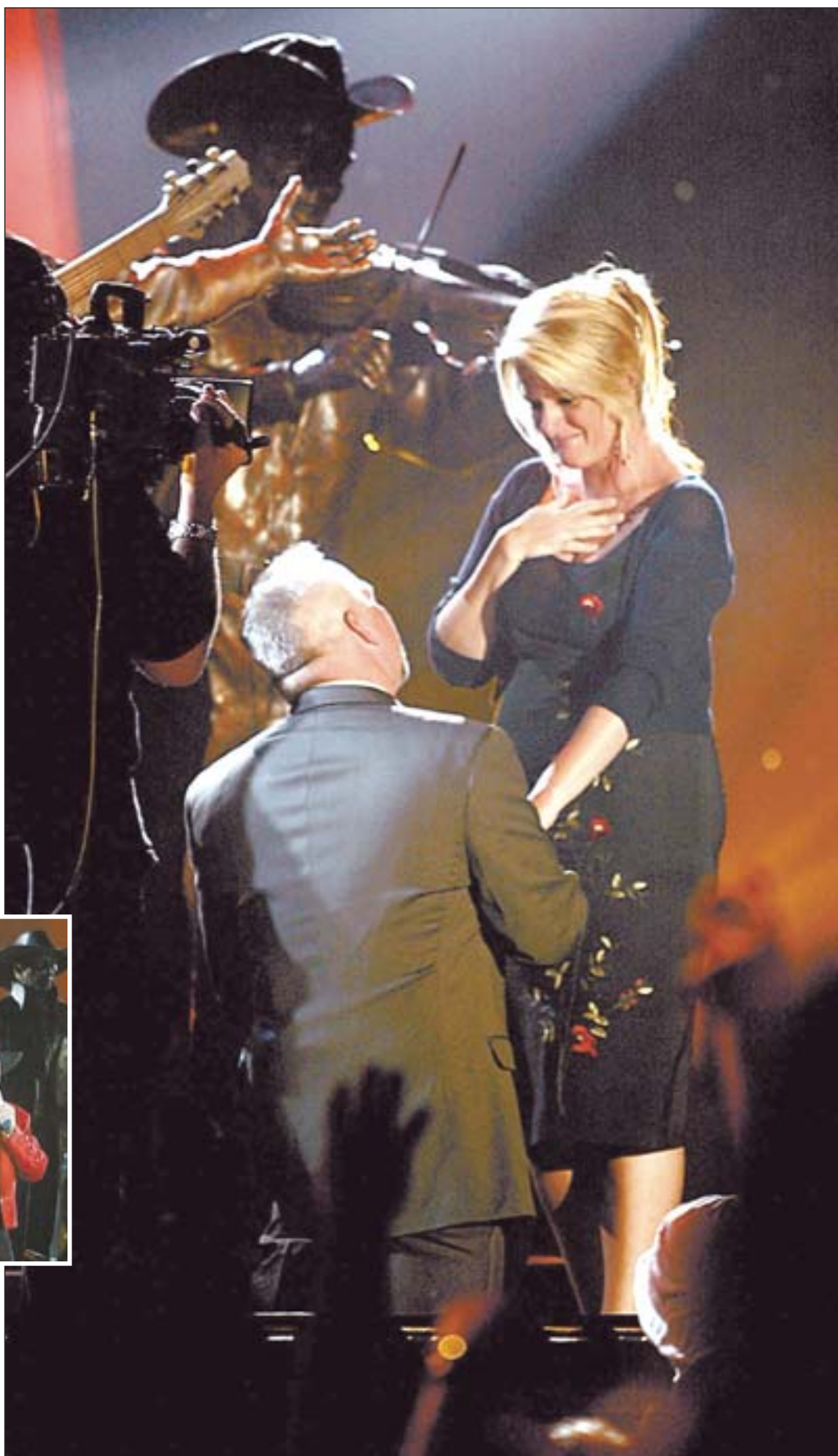
Brooks got on one knee and asked a teary-eyed Yearwood to be his wife. She smiled and nodded in acceptance, then they kissed in front of a sold-out audience, which went wild.

Brooks was on hand to see a bronze statue built in his likeness unveiled along with nine other statues of country music greats at Owens' popular steakhouse. Honorees included Brooks, Owens, Merle Haggard, Willie Nelson, George Strait, George Jones, Elvis Presley, Hank Williams Sr., Bob Wills and Johnny Cash.

The statues were made by sculptor Bill Rains, who had made the statues of Owens and Cash already on display at the Crystal Palace. The project took him two years.

The proposal came as a sur-

Please turn to **BRONZE / A6**



JOHN HARTE / THE CALIFORNIAN



If Trisha Yearwood was wondering why Garth Brooks dragged her on stage with Buck Owens for the unveiling of his statue, she was about to find out. Brooks stunned her, and a crowd of 7,000 deliriously cheering onlookers, with a marriage proposal.

Home for off-roaders in works

City, state make deal to buy 11,000 acres northeast of town

By JAMES BURGER

Californian staff writer
e-mail: jburger@bakersfield.com

Bakersfield and the state of California have inked a deal to buy 11,000 acres of cattle pasture northeast of the city and turn it into an off-road park.

It's a long-held dream of off-road riders who are watching Bakersfield's booming growth eat away their recreation areas.

The California State Parks department announced Wednesday it had teamed up with the city to buy land 30 minutes north of downtown Bakersfield.

City maps show the property sits just north of Round Mountain Road to the east of Granite Road near Poso Creek.

City officials signed a deal, earlier this month, to "option" the land from Eugene and Marian Gabrych for



THE CALIFORNIAN

between \$8.8 million and \$11 million.

The money would come from state Off-Highway Vehicle Trust funds — money raised from taxes and fees on motorcycles and quad-runners.

There are still some issues to iron out before the land is officially purchased.

The biggest is the need to secure ground for a road connecting the prop-

Please turn to **PARK / A6**

Americans find it hard to break away from job

Time off more of an afterthought for U.S. workers, survey shows

By AMY JOYCE

The Washington Post

Are you vacation-deprived?

According to a new study from Expedia.com: You probably are.

Americans are likely to give back more than 421 million vacation days in 2005, according to the survey of more than 2,000 people conducted by Harris Interactive and released this week. That means each employed U.S. adult will leave an average of three vacation

days unused this year. Nearly one third (31 percent) of Americans say they don't use all their vacation days, even though many say they feel rejuvenated when they return to work after a holiday.

We all talk about vacations, but according to this study, and in talking to hard workers out there, vacation is not always important enough to force us to take as much as we're offered.

The average length of vacation time spent away from home was four days in 2003, compared with 5.4 nights in 1985 and more than a week 25 years ago, according to the Travel Industry

Please turn to **VACATION / A6**

Flower thought extinct rediscovered in state park

By JUSTIN M. NORTON

The Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — A flower called the Mount Diablo buckwheat long thought to be extinct has been rediscovered in a California state park, about 30 miles east of San Francisco, more than six decades after it was last seen.

The pink wildflower *Eriogonum truncatum* — which resembles baby's breath used in floral arrangements — was last seen 69 years ago. It was found in a remote section of a Contra Costa County park, scientists said. The exact location is secret.

Botanists have searched in vain for the plant for decades. The find immediately drew comparisons to the recent discovery of the ivory-billed woodpecker in Arkansas, a bird long presumed extinct.



A bee visits the Mount Diablo buckwheat.

WEATHER

Today's high: **94**
Today's low: **72**
Air quality: Unhealthy **140**
Turn to page **B10** for complete weather information

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FOR THE RECORD

The American Cancer Society has been reviewing its sun-protection guidelines for more than a year. A May 22 Associated Press story on Vitamin D, sunshine and cancer was incorrect.

COMING TOMORROW

Read critics' take before hitting theater
"Madagascar" has jokes for the adults and colorful, captivating cartoon characters for the kids. There's also big-name voices behind the animals.
In "The Longest Yard," Adam Sandler plays quarterback and Burt Reynolds — a star in the 1974 original — is the prison team's coach.
Read the reviews in Friday's Movies & More.



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VACATION: Even if they do take time off, many Americans compelled to check in

Continued from A1

Association. With the economy sending us all on a roller coaster ride, workers nationwide have been stingier with their paid days off. It's important for employees to work hard, look like they are working hard and be at the ready when the boss needs someone to take on another project.

This week's study found that of the 31 percent of U.S. adults who said they don't always take all their vacation days, 13 percent said that's because they get money back for unused days, 12 percent said it was because they need to schedule a vacation in advance and 10 percent said they were simply too busy at work.

For Thomas Kim, a combination of all those factors means he hasn't had a vacation "in a couple of years." Kim runs a Web and software development firm in Washington that recently merged with a lobbying organization. Other than a long weekend to Chicago for a recent wedding, Kim and his wife, a lawyer, have mostly been tied to their work.

Owning his own business allows him to take longer lunches or stay home if their 1-year-old is sick, Kim said. But still, he said, that's no vacation.

"It would be wonderful to just kind of get away and unplug for a week and recoup, re-energize myself. But I don't really feel like it's an absolute necessity right now," he said. "And if I were to go away, I'm sure I'd still check e-mail or bring my BlackBerry."

Kim's not alone in that no-vacation vacation. According to the survey, 16

percent of respondents checked work e-mail or voice mail while vacationing.

That's why Nancy Palazza, president of Alternative Employment Specialists in suburban Washington, likes to vacation abroad: Her cell phone doesn't work there. "That's the only time I really feel like I'm on vacation. Other times, I'm always connected," she said. Palazza plans a vacation as soon as she gets home from one so she has something to look forward to. Her next vacation? France in July.

"I encourage my staff to do the same thing," she said. "Because I think if you don't take the time to go and do it, you feel like you're working forever, and you need down time."

But Palazza refuses to take a vacation of more than 10 days—a mindset that is very American, according to the survey. Thirty-eight percent of employees who have vacation time in 2005 say they will take one full week of vacation and use the rest of the time here and there.

France, the land of vacation time, provides its workers with an average of 39 days a year, while nearly half of its workers take one three- to four-week vacation each year.

Employed Canadian adults receive an average of 20 days of vacation, but its workers are tied with Americans in giving back the most vacation days per person: three days on average.

We need to take vacations. Sure, the e-mails pile up, and all the problems await us upon our return. But as 48 percent of the more than 2,000 respondents said, they feel rested and more productive when they get back.

"I envy the folks that do," Kim said.



JOHN HARTE / THE CALIFORNIAN

At long last, the bronze statues were unveiled at the Crystal Palace Wednesday night. In this photo, from left, are George Jones, Buck Owens, Garth Brooks, Bob Wills, Merle Haggard, Elvis Presley and Johnny Cash.

BRONZE: Rumors of couple's nuptials have been floating around for years

Continued from A1

praise at the event where Owens, Brooks, Jones and Haggard were to be honored for their vast contributions to country music.

Brooks and Yearwood have been romantically linked for more than 15 years, but only started dating "officially" after the break-ups of their respective marriages.

Rumors of their nuptials have been floating for years and as recently as 2003.

People came from all over to see the show. Owens, Dierks Bentley, Ray Benson of Asleep at the Wheel, Joe Nichols and Brad Paisley were scheduled to perform.

Before the concert, Owens, Jones and Haggard addressed the press together, arm-in-arm, joking about their years in the country music business.

The former rivals, now contemporaries and friends, laughed it up on a day celebrating the mark they've left on the art form.

"For 48 hours, Merle and I," Owens said of how long he and Haggard could go on trading stories. "We know that many stories and we don't know how many of them are true. And we don't want to find out."

It was Owens' idea to put together the statue series after it was initially proposed in Nashville, Tenn.

The project was moving too slow for Owens' taste so he decided to assemble his own tribute to country's greats in Bakersfield.

"I've known about it for quite some time and I'm excited to be part of the gifted, the selected few," Haggard said.

"Nobody contributed more to country music than these two," Owens said with his arms around Haggard and Jones. "Merle is in the bronze because he deserves to be."

The three said playing music keeps them young and that they never plan on giving it up.

"I always loved traditional country music," Jones said. "I always will." As an honoree, Brooks was humbled to be in bronze amid so many men he admired.

"This is an important night," Brooks said. "Long overdue."

Brooks talked about how in the industry people are used up and "thrown away." He was glad to see the greats would be remembered.

The night began with local band Steve Davis and Stampede, performing on stage with the bronze statues, all covered up, behind them.

Aside from some bleachers set up on the sides, the backlot was "standing room only" as thousands of people



George Jones, Merle Haggard, Buck Owens and the statue designer, Bill Rains, pose for photos inside the Crystal Palace before the statue unveilings Wednesday night.

watched as Owens entered to begin the unveiling, first by getting the crowd riled up by shouting repeatedly, "Bakersfield California!" then later, "Nashville, who?"

Gail MacDonald, 41, of Los Osos came to the show after a series of misfortunes, including her home being burnt down.

A longtime country fan, MacDonald was at the Crystal Palace earlier that day when a woman with an extra ticket invited her to the show.

"I think it's great," said MacDonald of the concert and the bronze statues being in Bakersfield. "Perfect place for it to be and the Crystal Palace is such a unique place."

Longtime Bakersfield resident Lana Churchwell, 60, agreed. When the concert was announced earlier this month, she immediately told her son to show up at the Palace at 6 a.m. to stand in line for tickets.

"They stood in line all morning," she said, adding, "I was very, very proud of the Crystal Palace (for the statues). I'm very, very proud to be part of Bakersfield."

Owens unveiled the statues in the order each country great made their mark in music, starting with Wills then Williams.

Audience members sang along as music played over the video tributes before each unveiling.

With Brooks as the most contemporary artist honored, his statue was unfurled last. After a video tribute to Brooks, the country hit-maker came out with Yearwood to take a closer look at the statue. Yearwood appeared to be straying off with Brooks to look



Among a crowd estimated at 7,000, Matthew Amick, 9, had a pretty good vantage point on the shoulders of his dad, Richard Amick.

at a statue of Bob Wills when suddenly Brooks got down on one knee, causing the audible gasps of Yearwood and the thousands in attendance.

Owens congratulated the couple after Yearwood accepted Brooks' ring. "This is one of the greatest days of my life. Thank God!" shouted Brooks after Yearwood accepted.

Brooks' announcement nearly stole the show, which was already in high gear before any band set up on the stage.

After all the statues were unveiled and the stage was prepared for the opening act, outside the concert, Bakersfield was abuzz with the engagement news.

"I thought they were already engaged," said Chris Finberg at the popular downtown sports bar and grill

Tailgaters. "The guy's a nut and they'll never see the wedding," said Ernie Bentley.

"Don't say that," said his companion, Bev Bobbitt. "I love Garth. Garth is wonderful."

Bobbitt, a Garth and Trisha fan, heard the wedding plans first when Yearwood was interviewed backstage at the Country Music Awards.

She said she's happy for the couple. "If two people are in love, they should be together," said Dre' Alexander.

"I wish them luck," said a skeptical Amy Hanson. "For the most part star marriages don't last. One of them is going to have to give up something in their career."

Californian staff writer James Burger contributed to this report.



DICK TAYLOR / KERN OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE ASSOCIATION

This view shows land that could become a new off-highway vehicle park northeast of Bakersfield.

PARK: Many, including the Sierra Club, credit off-road leader with plan's success

Continued from A1

erty to Round Mountain Road within the next year. The city has a year to get the access or the deal will fall through.

Still, local leaders are excited about the new development.

"It's a giant step forward," said Vice Mayor Mike Maggard. "I think the site could be beyond our wildest dreams. We've looked at a number of sites. This clearly was the best of them. This is the dream spot. If we make this work it will make the most people happy."

Local off-road leader Dick Taylor—who championed the deal—has been hoping for a permanent home for motorbikers and quad-riders since 2001.

Over the past few years, riding land in northeast Bakersfield has been gobbled up by homes. Motorcyclists have seen their habitat shrink steadily.

They were shoved off the Kern River bluffs south of Hart Park. And that started them thinking about finding their own land.

"We came away with a quest for a replacement riding area for the (bluffs) area we've ridden in since the 1920s," Taylor said.

Now that quest is a big step closer to being achieved.

"This new (State Vehicular Recreation Area) will provide OHV enthusi-

asts a place to enjoy their sport in a well-managed, family-friendly atmosphere with a variety of amenities," said Daphne Greene, deputy director of the state's off-highway recreation division.

Many attribute the success of the effort to Taylor's ability to draw support from groups that traditionally fight tooth-and-nail to stop off-roading.

Harry Love, of the local chapter of Sierra Club, worked on the committee Taylor pulled together.

"Dick Taylor has done a great job of getting a variety of people involved," he said.

Love said a comprehensive environmental report will ensure that the project doesn't harm the environment.

And he cheered the part of the plan that will reserve much of the 11,000 acres for buffer property—property that would be open to public use.

"There's so many off-road people in Bakersfield and I'm sure they will be happy to have a place to go," said trails advocate Michelle Beck.

Maggard said the site will be great for off-roaders—close to town, but not too close to anger homeowners—and with a wide variety of terrain from flat areas for training children to steep climbs for the experts.

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