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TUESDAY, MARCH 16, 2004

50¢

## Victim of lung disease is awarded \$20 million

He sued companies that make butter flavoring for popcorn

By **CONNIE FARROW**  
*Associated Press Writer*

JOPLIN, Mo. — A jury in Jasper County awarded \$20 million Monday to a former worker at a microwave popcorn plant in the first of a series of lawsuits blaming butter flavoring for irreversible lung damage.

Eric Peoples was one of 30 former workers at the Gilster-Mary Lee plant in Jasper to sue two manufacturers of butter flavorings.

After a morning of closing arguments, the jury deliberated for about two hours before returning the verdict.

Peoples wept and hugged his wife, Cassandra, as the Jasper County jury ruled against International Flavors & Fragrances Inc. and its subsidiary, Bush Boake Allen Inc. They were ordered to pay \$18 million to Eric Peoples and \$2 million to his wife for compensatory personal injury damages. Punitive damages were not awarded.

"We're relieved that it's over and our lives can get back to as normal as they can be," said Eric Peoples. He added that no amount of money will be able to make up for the time he expects to lose with his family.

His attorney argued that Peoples, 32, is likely to live for only 20 more years, and only after undergoing a double-lung transplant.

Peoples said, "At least for now, we'll be able to spoil our children and let them forget for a while."

### Outbreaks elsewhere

The attorneys for the manufacturers left the courthouse without speaking to reporters. A spokeswoman for International Flavors & Fragrances said she had no comment about the verdict or whether the case would be appealed.

Gilster-Mary Lee, based in Chester, Ill., is not a defendant in the lawsuit.

The case could set an important precedent because health investigators have detected similar

*See Award, A10*

**STL today.com** Read previous stories on the popcorn workers' health problems and the trial at [STLtoday.com/links](http://STLtoday.com/links).

*In the wake of May's twisters that killed 19 in Missouri, the state's annual tornado drill at 1:30 p.m. today takes on more meaning.*

# TORNADOES

## Students turn into chasers as season's first storm beckons

By **TODD C. FRANKEL**  
*Of the Post-Dispatch*

NORMAN, Okla. — In a hotel lobby in the heart of Tornado Alley, four men watched radar images scroll across a computer screen. The angry red and yellow storm swirls were headed their way. It looked very promising.

Already, they were under a tornado watch. And the nation's Storm Prediction Center, just a few miles away, put out a severe weather statement: "THIS IS A PARTICULARLY DANGEROUS SITUATION . . . DESTRUCTIVE TORNADOES . . . LARGE HAIL TO 2 INCHES IN DIAMETER . . . THUNDERSTORM WIND GUSTS TO 90 MPH . . ."

Justin Turcotte, 26, who studies meteorology at the University of Nebraska, stuck some sunflower seeds in his cheek. He peered at the computer.

"We've got 90 minutes to do it. Otherwise, we're going to miss it," Turcotte said.

The chase was on.

In the coming months, as tornado season heats up and twisters drop from

the sky destroying homes and lives, chasers will be following close behind. And there is no better place in the world to chase than Tornado Alley, a 10-state region centered on Oklahoma and Texas that includes Missouri and Illinois.

This was Tornado Alley's first severe thunderstorm this year. It couldn't have come at a better time. It was the first day of the National Severe Weather Workshop in Norman, the U.S. tornado research capital. More than 300 meteorologists, emergency managers and weather junkies were in town recently for the event. But once word of the tornado watch broke, many ditched the meetings and headed for their cars.

Oklahoma hadn't seen a tornado in nearly 300 days — a remarkable twister drought. The last one touched down in May, the month when "all hell broke loose"

*See Weather, A8*

**ARE YOU PREPARED?**  
What's in store for this year and what you should do in the event of a tornado. **A8**



ABOVE: JUSTIN TURCOTTE, INSET: NOAA

**2:00 p.m.** The storm looms just ahead on U.S. Highway 81 between Comanche and Duncan, Okla. The National Weather Service radar map shows a severe thunderstorm stretching across southwest Oklahoma on March 4.



**TODD FRANKEL / POST-DISPATCH**  
Justin Turcotte (left) and Adam Prenzlow take snapshots as day turns to night.

**5 minutes later**



**TODD FRANKEL / POST-DISPATCH**

**2:15 p.m.** Prenzlow (left), James McCormick (center) and Terence Davidson watch a giant storm cloud from a gas station.



JUSTIN TURCOTTE

**2:45 p.m.** The storm chasers come upon a metal shed destroyed by wind east of Duncan.

## 3 American civilians are killed in Iraq

### Drive-by shooting wounds 2 others, military says

By **CAROL ROSENBERG**  
*Knight Ridder Newspapers*

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Gunmen ambushed a car carrying American relief workers Monday night in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, killing three U.S. civilians and seriously wounding two others in what appears to be the second targeted attack on civilians doing reconstruction work in less than a week.

"All five U.S. citizens belong to a private volunteer organization. . . . They were in the Mosul area to deliver relief supplies," said U.S. Army Lt. Col. Joseph Piek, a military spokesman for coalition operations in Mosul, 240 miles north of Baghdad.

Killed were Larry and Jean Dover Elliott of Cary, N.C., and Karen Watson of Bakersfield, Calif., all of whom worked for the Southern Baptist International Mission Board. Names of the wounded were being withheld while the military contacted the group, which would in turn help notify their families.

The Americans were traveling in the same car Monday evening and were discovered in an area of eastern Mosul by an off-duty Iraqi police officer shortly after the 5 p.m. shooting, Piek said. A coalition spokeswoman in Baghdad described them as the victim of a "drive-by shooting."

The Iraqi policeman took the two survivors to an Iraqi hospital. U.S. Army helicopters later moved them to a U.S. Army combat support hospital in Mosul. One was in surgery early today and the other in guarded condition in the hospital's intensive-care unit.

It was not immediately known what the Americans were doing at the time of the attack. Iraqi police were gathering evidence, with involvement of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Piek said.

The FBI is already assisting Iraqi police in another apparent targeted killing of two U.S. Defense Department contractors and their Iraqi translator in

*See Iraq, A7*

### ANALYSIS

## Spain's shift on Iraq is seen as blow to U.S.

### Emboldening terrorists is a concern

By **PHILIP DINE**  
*Post-Dispatch Washington Bureau*

WASHINGTON — The new Spanish government's decision to reduce support for the American-led coalition in Iraq, after last week's deadly terrorist attack in Madrid, is ominous for the United States and its allies, officials and experts said Monday.

It not only removes a strong partner in the coalition's effort in Iraq, but also could prompt other European nations that feel threatened to reconsider their support, despite public pledges to stay the course.

And the impact the attack had on the Spanish election may encourage terrorists to strike again to further weaken support for the effort in Iraq, perhaps timed with other national elections — including the U.S. vote in November.

"It's all of the above," said Clifford May, president of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, a Washington think tank formed after Sept. 11, 2001, to devise strategies to win the war on terrorism.

"The terrorists who slaughtered 200 people in Madrid on March 11 had another victory over the weekend. Without any ads, without any political arguments, they managed to have an impact on

*See Spain, A6*

**Spain's incoming prime minister pledged** Monday to bring Spanish troops home from Iraq unless the United Nations takes control there. **A6**

**U.S. allies in Iraq vowed to stay the course** in the wake of the train bombings in Madrid. **A6**

## Discovery of icy rock past Pluto could alter view of solar system

### Planetoid's orbit of sun takes 10,500 Earth years

By **ELI KINTISCH**  
*Of the Post-Dispatch*

The most distant object in our solar system ever observed could rewrite the history of the Earth and sun, astronomers say.

Scientists found the icy world late last year and officially an-

nounced the discovery in a press conference Monday. Astronomers have named it Sedna after an Inuit sea goddess. Scientists believe the barren object, dubbed a planetoid, is made of the same ice and rock that comprises Pluto and other far-flung debris.

Sedna may not be large enough to earn status as a planet, a distinction scientists admit is somewhat arbitrary. But it could reshape how researchers conceive of the early solar system.

Astronomers behind the discovery think the chunk was

thrown out of the early solar system long ago. But they hypothesize that stars nearby our nascent solar system could have altered Sedna's path, giving it its vast orbit around the sun and planets.

Mike Brown, an astronomer at the California Institute of Technology, suggested that if such a star did exist in the early days of our sun, it would have appeared brighter on Earth than a full moon, visible in the daytime sky.

Yale astronomer David Rabinowitz, who along with Brown

*See Planetoid, A10*

### Understanding skyspeak

As astronomers find new objects, the words they use get stretched. "These definitions have to be flexible," said Jim Kaler, a retired astronomer at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

**Planet:** A major body that orbits a star.

**Planetoid:** An informal name for a minor planet.

**Asteroid:** Body of rock debris that orbits a star; most of ours sit between Mars and Jupiter.

**Kuiper Belt objects:** Icy rock junk sitting outside Neptune's orbit. The largest: You guessed it, Pluto. That breeds controversy over its status as a planet.

INSIDE	
Classifieds	<b>F1</b>
Corrections	<b>A2</b>
Editorial	<b>A6</b>
Lotteries	<b>B2</b>
Movies	<b>E2</b>
Obituaries	<b>B4-5</b>
Television	<b>E6</b>

**Pakistani police defuse big bomb at U.S. Consulate**

Secretary of State Colin Powell still plans to arrive in Pakistan on Wednesday for a two-day visit. **A2**

**Sharon rules out negotiations after killer blasts**

The prime minister accused the Palestinian leadership of doing nothing to stop terrorist attacks. **A7**

**Park tax critics file complaint with ethics panel**

Critics of St. Louis County's Proposition P allege public funds were used to promote measure. **METRO**

**FleetBoston, Bank of America settle fund suits**

The merging banks will pay \$515 million to resolve allegations of improper fund trading. **BUSINESS**



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