

SNOW DAY
Snow today, mixing with sleet and rain this evening; light snow tonight.
Forecast, E10

The Providence Journal

FRIDAY
FEBRUARY 22, 2008

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Jury finds Oster guilty of bribery and extortion charges



Jonathan F. Oster, left, former town administrator in Lincoln, will be sentenced on May 8.

Jurors agree that the former Lincoln town administrator conspired with an ex-Planning Board member to solicit bribes.

BY JOHN HILL
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — Eight years ago, Robert R. Picerno's fundraising zeal helped propel Jonathan F. Oster into the Lincoln town administrator's office. After yesterday, it may wind up putting him in jail. That's because a Superior Court jury, after listening to a case that relied heavily on tapes of Picerno's conversations with bribery targets and with Oster, found the former state senator guilty of two counts

of bribery and two counts of extortion for actions he took while town administrator from 2000-2002.

The state charged, and the jury agreed, that Oster was engaged in two conspiracies with Picerno in 2001 to sell a piece of town-controlled land, the H&H Screw property on Route 116, for \$105,000 — less than the \$600,000-plus that was owed in back taxes on the property. Picerno — who brought in nearly a quarter of the \$43,284 Oster raised for his 2000 town administrator run — was supposed to find the targets and collect the payoff money, the state said. Oster's role was to get Town Council approval of the sale.

The announcement of yesterday's verdict came around 12:30 p.m., after about a day and a half of deliberations.

As he had throughout the almost four-week trial, Oster sat straight-backed and stoic as the verdicts were read, his head only shaking slightly as the first guilty verdict was announced. His wife's eyes were red and moist as the jury filed out of the room, and the group of friends who had been in court nearly every day embraced and whispered to each other.

Associate Justice Gilbert V. Indeglia set Oster's sentencing for May 8. The former two-term senator and one-term town administrator faces up to 20 years in prison on each bribery count and 10 years

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Your turn: To react to the verdict, go to projo.com

SEE **OSTER, B6**



PRECISELY IN PROVIDENCE

Thousands arrive in the city for the Synchronized Skating Championships, a national event that will add an estimated \$2 million to the economy.

BY TALIA BUFORD
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — A blue fleece jacket is what first caught Jamie Smith's eye. "Mom, how much stuff can I get," asked Jamie, 15, of the Downers Grove Dazzlers, from Illinois, as she stood in a vendor line in the hallway of the Dunkin' Donuts Center.

Smith, along with about 1,800 skaters from around the country converged on the capital city this week for the United States Synchronized Skating Cham-

pionships at The Dunk.

The event, hosted by the Colonial Figure Skating Club of West Acton, Mass., brings together 92 teams and nearly 5,000 spectators for the championships, which will be awarded tomorrow.

In the meantime, the teams will skate, eat and shop in the area, bringing a much-needed boost to the local economy.

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Gallery: For more photos of the U.S. Synchronized Skating Championships at The Dunk, go to projo.com

That fleece would run Jamie \$70. The hooded sweatshirt she also fancied? Another \$40.

For competitions such as this one, there's at least one guaranteed winner: the host community.

"It's the stuff that nobody reads

SEE **SKATING, A6**

The Colonials of Boxboro, Mass., perform in the junior championship division at the Dunkin' Donuts Center yesterday.

THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL
KRIS CRAIG

Democrats' debate takes contentious turn over lifted speech lines

With key March 4 primaries looming, the dispute over Sen. Barack Obama's speeches is rehashed. He calls the charge that he plagiarized "silly."

BY PATRICK HEALY and JEFF ZELENY
THE NEW YORK TIMES

After a collegial 45 minutes where they acted more like running mates than rivals, Senators Hillary Rodham Clinton and Barack Obama turned combative in a debate last night, with Clinton all but accusing Obama of plagiarism and deriding his political message as "change you can Xerox."

Clinton, who is girding for March 4 primaries in Texas and Ohio that aides say she must win — as well as contests in Rhode Island and Vermont — veered from polite to pointed as she challenged the original-

SEE **DEBATE, A7**



U.S. attacked for stance on Kosovo

Demonstrators set fire to the U.S. Embassy in Belgrade yesterday during a protest of Kosovo's decision, supported by Washington, to declare its independence from Serbia, which considers the region its ancestral homeland. **Story, A5**

The decision "sends the strong message that we will hold abusers accountable for their acts of torture and violence."

DEBORAH DeBARE, Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Maximum sentence for domestic abuse upheld

The state Supreme Court rules that Joseph McManus, convicted of torture and aggravated battery in slaying his wife in 1996, can be sentenced to life without parole because of the "heinous and horrific" nature of his crime.

BY EDWARD FITZPATRICK
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

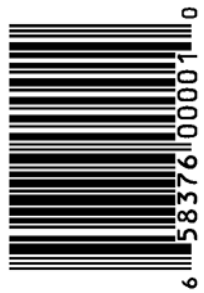
PROVIDENCE — For the first time, the state Supreme Court yesterday upheld a sentence of life without the possibility of parole for a crime of domestic violence involving a husband and wife, rejecting the appeal of a Narragansett man who plunged a kitchen knife into his wife's heart.

Joseph E. McManus Jr., a mainte-

nance worker at the Bonnet Shores Beach Club, was convicted of first-degree murder for stabbing his wife, Kelly McGinity McManus, to death while two of their three children were home.

A jury found the murder involved torture and aggravated battery, and McManus was given the maximum sentence available under Rhode Island

SEE **SENTENCE, A6**



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WOLVES AT ISSUE

Environmentalists say they'll challenge the Bush administration's decision to remove gray wolves in the Northern Rockies from the endangered species list. **A4**

MYSTERY DEEPENS

A 21-year-old Johnson & Wales student reported missing last week is now back home with her family in New Jersey, but the mystery surrounding her disappearance is only deepening. **B1**

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR WORKERS

More than 3,000 Rhode Island workers are eligible for on-the-job training thanks to grants totaling more than \$3 million from the Governor's Workforce Board Rhode Island and 77 participating businesses and organizations. **F1**

URI FALLS TO UMASS



The Minutemen score 7 points on two huge turnovers on back-to-back possessions by the Rams in the last 90 seconds of the game en route to a 98-91 win. **C1**