

**TRIFECTA**  
Sunny, breezy and warm today, with highs in the 70s; clear tonight.  
**Forecast, F10**

# The Providence Journal

**THURSDAY**  
APRIL 24, 2008

**75¢**  
Home Delivery 401.277.7600

projo.com

## North Tiverton residents 'cautiously optimistic'



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / BOB THAYER

Gail Corvello and Jaeley, one of the youngsters at her daycare center at her North Tiverton home yesterday, where the backyard is covered with fake grass to protect the children from contaminants in the soil.

## 'Potential' soil case settlement

A deal might end a 5½-year battle between Southern Union and about 100 homeowners over who is responsible for cleaning up 50 acres of contaminated soil.

**BY GINA MACRIS**  
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER  
TIVERTON — On the eve of a federal trial, lawyers have reached a potential settlement of the most complicated and extensive soil contamination case in Rhode Island.

About 100 homeowners have sought remediation of a total of 50 acres of property in North Tiverton for the last 5½ years, ever since a sewer construction crew came across soil tinged a cobalt blue — a marker of cyanide.

Jury selection in the trial was to start yesterday.

But on Tuesday afternoon, U.S. District Judge Ernest C. Torres

heard from lawyers for the homeowner plaintiffs and the defendant, the Texas-based utility Southern Union, that they had reached a "potential settlement," according to Torres' clerk, Ryan Jackson.

He said Torres received the news in a "sealed hearing" and declined further comment, except to say that the trial has been taken off the judge's calendar.

Robert McConnell, a lead lawyer for the plaintiffs, described the deal hammered out by the lawyers as a "conditional settlement."

McConnell said he expected "that the condition will be met and the case will be resolved," but he declined any additional comment.

Gail Corvello, the lead plaintiff in the case, said she and her husband, John, are "cautiously optimistic" that they will see an end to the seemingly endless ordeal which began in August 2002, with the discovery of the bright blue soil near their home on Bay Street.

Under the advice of their lawyers, the Corvellos also declined substantive comment on the potential settlement, with John Corvello warning that there "could still be a bump in the road."

More than anyone, Gail Corvello has personified the travails of the Bay Street neighborhood in her



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / GEORGE SYLVIA

SEE **SOIL, A11**

"I'm going to have influence on generations of offspring that I probably will never meet."

**CHRISTOPHER GARDNER**

## PURSUIT BRINGS HAPPINESS, AND CASH, TO FOOD BANK

Christopher Gardner, whose life story was the topic of the popular book and movie *The Pursuit of Happyness*, helps raise money for the state's needy.

**BY TOM MOONEY**  
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — Christopher Gardner's life story of homelessness to riches catapulted him to fame. He's the subject of the Hollywood blockbuster *The Pursuit of Happyness* starring Will Smith, and a best-selling author whose retelling of his remarkable journey fetches \$50,000 an appearance.

But the guy knows how to make money for others, too.

"Do me a favor, lock all the doors, lock all the people in here," he said yesterday over an applauding luncheon crowd of 750 gathered at the Rhode Island Convention Center for the 25th anniversary of the Rhode Island Community Food Bank. The audience had just given him a standing ovation at the end of his speech, in which he defined his biggest success as being a responsible father.

SEE **GARDNER, A10**



Christopher Gardner, left, his daughter Jacintha, and son Christopher arrive at the premiere of the film *The Pursuit of Happyness* in Los Angeles in 2006. The movie is based on Gardner's rags-to-riches life story. Yesterday, he was in Rhode Island to raise money for the Rhode Island Community Food Bank.

ASSOCIATED PRESS/MATT SAYLES

## State workers may opt to retire

The governor's cost-cutting retirement plan is expected to prompt thousands of state employees to retire early to avoid tougher eligibility rules.

**BY STEVE PEOPLES**  
JOURNAL STATE HOUSE BUREAU

PROVIDENCE — Sheila Ellis waited for nearly an hour inside the stuffy reception area of the state retirement office yesterday afternoon. And she would have waited longer, given what was at stake.

At just 45 years old, Ellis must decide whether to retire from the state job she has held since high school, or risk losing substantial health-care coverage for the rest of her life.

It's a decision she wanted to talk over with a retirement counselor.

"I'm young enough, it would be nice to work," said Ellis, who has worked with developmentally disabled adults for the last 28 years.

But really, her mind was already made up. State lawmakers this week pushed Ellis and probably thousands more state employees into retirement.

The House Finance Committee, which largely controls the state budget, voted Tuesday to endorse Governor's Carcieri's cost-cutting plan to reduce the state's contribution for health benefits for state workers who retire after Sept. 30. Current retirees pay nothing or a fraction of the overall health-care cost.

The new plan, which is expected to be approved by the House of Representatives tomorrow as part of a midyear deficit-avoidance package, would require retirees to contribute almost \$1,700 each year for health care and includes new age standards. After Sept. 30, a retiree must be at least 59 years old and have worked for the state at least 20 years to qualify.

That means that if Ellis retires on Oct. 1, she would have to wait another 14 years to receive state-subsidized health coverage. A majority of

SEE **RETIRE, A11**

## Role of race still an issue for Democrats

The party struggles to evaluate voters' attitudes toward the likelihood that an African-American will be its nominee for president.

**BY ADAM NAGOURNEY**  
THE NEW YORK TIMES

It is the question that has hung over Sen. Barack Obama's presidential primary campaign, and it loomed large again Tuesday night after his loss in Pennsylvania to Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton: Why has he been unable to win over enough working class and white voters to wrap up the Democratic nomination?

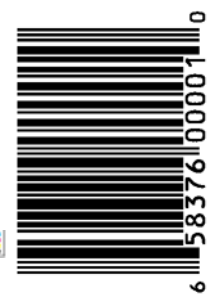
Lurking behind that question is another: Is the Democratic Party hesitating about race as it moves to the brink of nominating an African-American to be president?

Obama remains ahead of Clinton in delegates, in the popular vote and in national polls. But just when it seemed that the Democratic Party was close to anointing Obama as its nominee, he lost yet again in a big general election state, dragged down by his weakness among blue-collar voters, older voters and white voters.

The Illinois senator won only 38 percent of the white vote in Pennsylvania on Tuesday, a big part of the reason he lost the state. And it's not just the Keystone State.

Of the 30 states so far where voters were in-

SEE **CAMPAIGN, A4**



### INSIDE TODAY

© 2008 Published daily since 1829

6 SECTIONS	
Ask Amy	<b>E14</b>
Bridge	<b>E14</b>
Business	<b>F1</b>
Classified	<b>F7</b>
Comics	<b>E15</b>
Crossword	<b>E14</b>
Editorial	<b>B4</b>
Legal ads	<b>F4</b>
Lifebeat Weekend	<b>E1</b>
Local News	<b>C1</b>
Lotteries	<b>D4</b>
Obituaries	<b>C6</b>
People	<b>E1</b>
Rhode Island	<b>B1</b>
Sports	<b>D1</b>
Television	<b>E13</b>

### PROMOTION FOR PETRAEUS

President Bush nominates Army Gen. David Petraeus, the commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, to be the next head of U.S. Central Command. **A2**

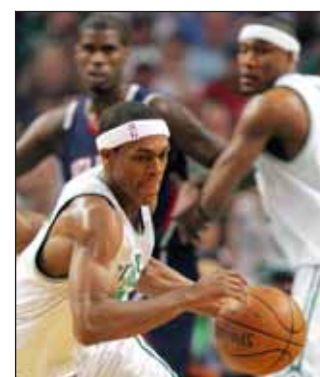


### RESTRICTIONS ON RICE

With U.S. rice futures hitting a record high, the nation's two biggest warehouse retail chains move to limit how much rice customers can buy because of what one company calls "recent supply and demand trends." **A2**

### BOTTLE-BILL BATTLE

Witnesses for and against a bottle bill state their cases on whether the state should require a 5-cent deposit on almost all beverage containers. **B1**



### RONDO'S REVENGE

Rajon Rondo's play fires up the crowd and silences Hawks guard Mike Bibby who had criticized Boston fans, as the Celtics coast to a 96-77 win over Atlanta to take a 2-0 lead in the first round of the NBA playoff series. **D1**