

FINE FINISH

Sunny and warm today with highs in the mid-80s; clear and comfortable tonight.

Forecast, F8

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State workers taking a hard look at contract proposals

Given Rhode Island's fiscal condition, some believe they have no option but to accept the offer designed to reduce the budget deficit.

BY KATHERINE GREGG
JOURNAL STATE HOUSE BUREAU

PROVIDENCE — The votes are starting to roll in on new contracts that would leave most state workers without raises this year and force them to pay more and more each year for their health

insurance packages, until they are paying up to 25 percent of the premiums.

Several hundred state workers have already said yes to new contracts. They include affiliates of the Laborers International Union of North America and Local 580

of the Rhode Island Alliance of Social Service Employees.

The winning argument: the economy is bad, state government is eliminating hundreds of jobs, and by the time negotiators sit back down at the bargaining table, it could be worse. And, unlike many of their counterparts in state government, the Local 580 employees — about 1,200 of them — already had a 3-percent raise

queued up for July 1 of this year under an earlier contract.

"People were concerned," acknowledged Sen. Frank Ciccone, a field representative for an arm of the Laborers that counts about 900 state workers among its members. "I was trying to be as realistic and honest as I could be with them saying, look ... four years ago I might have recommended that they didn't ratify it,

but with the economy the way it is now and the state in the condition that it is in, is it a great contract? No. Is it a good contract? I would have to say yes."

But yesterday, an affiliate of the National Education Association that represents the Association of Clerical-Technical Employees at the University of Rhode Island soundly defeated the proposal with local NEA di-

rector Robert Walsh acknowledging that many people at the meeting "spoke about their frustration with the overall economic package."

And several thousand other state workers are caught in the middle of a war between leaders of the largest employees union, Council 94, American Federation

SEE **CONTRACTS, A9**

Working on a better life



For the second straight year, Anthony Ericastilla, 16, of Providence, is spending his summer vacation working for the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council.

THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / **STEVE SZYDLOWSKI**, above; **KRIS CRAIG**, right

Special Report: For our multimedia report on the Gangs of Providence, go to projo.com/gangs

A jobs program is playing a key role in keeping Providence's youths safe this summer.

BY W. ZACHARY MALINOWSKI
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE

A part-time summer job may have saved Anthony Ericastilla's life.

The teenager struggled through his freshman year at Hope High School. He skipped school, hung out with gang members and was disrespectful to his parents, immigrants from Guatemala who had moved to the city's Silver Lake neighborhood in search of a better life.

Anthony's mother, Corina Barraza, was at wit's end. She turned to the Institute for the Study & Practice of Nonviolence, in South Providence, for help. The institute welcomed Barraza and the staff expressed concern for her plight. They assigned three streetworkers to her son and helped him get a job in the agency's Beloved Community Summer Jobs Program.

Last summer, Anthony worked for the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council maintaining the bike path, painting signs and performing other odd jobs.

SEE **JOBS, A9**



"He started to change immediately."

CORINA BARRAZA
mother of Anthony Ericastilla



This is the first job for most of the teenagers.

HEATHER GAYDOS
youth program director



She plans to save money and help her mother pay the bills.

ALEXANDRA POLANCO
working as a receptionist

PUC OKs increased electricity, gas rates

Commissioners say they are aware what the decision means in difficult economic times, but maintain they had no choice.

BY PAUL EDWARD PARKER
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Starting Tuesday, National Grid customers in Rhode Island will pay 21.7 percent more for electricity and 8 percent more for natural gas, the Public Utilities Commission voted yesterday.

The commission also voted to have an independent auditor review National Grid's financial statements to confirm the calculations that were used to support the rate hikes.

The electric rate increase, which was approved unanimously, is what National Grid had asked for. The new rate will be good until Jan. 1.

The gas rate increase, passed on a 2-to-1 vote, is less than the 10 percent the company had sought. That new rate expires Nov. 1.

For a typical home heated by natural gas, average monthly gas bills will grow by \$9.60 to \$129.43. Electric bills will go up \$16.67 to \$93.44. That would make the total bill for the year for both utilities climb about \$330.

The commissioners said they were painfully aware of what their vote means in these difficult

Your monthly bills

Before rate hike
Electric: \$76.77
Gas: \$119.83
After rate hike
Electric: \$93.44
Gas: \$129.43

Monthly average over a 12-month period for a residential customer who uses 500-kilowatt hours of electricity a month and 922 therms of gas a year.
Source: National Grid

SEE **RATES, A4**

'Gap kids' fate to be decided in Family Court

The state Supreme Court rules that the 17-year-olds who had been charged as adults under a now-repealed state law should have hearings in Family Court.

BY EDWARD FITZPATRICK
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — Dozens of "gap kids" who were charged as adults during the 130 days when Rhode Island prosecuted 17-year-olds as adults are entitled to Family Court hearings to determine if they should be tried in adult courts, the state Supreme Court ruled yesterday.

That includes the most high-profile gap kid, Ryan Greenberg, who has been indicted on a second-degree murder charge in connection with the boating death of another Barrington teenager, Patrick Murphy. The high court backed a trial judge's decision to hold Greenberg's indictment

SEE **GAP KIDS, B2**

School's error deferred family's long-sought celebration

BY ALISHA A. PINA
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

EAST PROVIDENCE — The Oliver family was devastated.

Richard and Cynthia Oliver had dreamed for years of the day they would watch their son, dressed in cap and gown, walk across a stage to receive his high school diploma. Christopher D. Oliver would be the first person in the family to make it through the 12th grade, the first to graduate.

They even planned a big graduation party so they could celebrate their son's accomplishment.



C. OLIVER

piano, French and Rhode Island history. "It was surreal," Richard Oliver wrote in a letter to *The Journal*. "It really didn't make sense.

But graduation day, June 14, turned out to be "a sad and solemn day for our entire family, but most of all for Christopher," said Richard Oliver.

Just days before the ceremony, the Olivers learned that their son was one credit shy of meeting the graduation requirements. He had flunked

Christopher had always been a good student. He had challenges and issues with some subjects on occasion, being a senior this year, he was feeling his oats and goofed off some toward the end of the year, but it had never entered our minds that he would not graduate. He had never been kept back a grade in his life!"

The 18-year-old, who refused to comment, couldn't believe it either. His parents said he was "certain he had accumulated enough credits to graduate," but they told him the school "must be

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MORTGAGE WORRIES

The deepening housing crisis is leading some to fear that the federal government may be forced to step in and bail out two of the nation's biggest home mortgage companies. **F1**

FINGERPRINTING UNDER FIRE

Italy's decision to fingerprint all Romas, or Gypsies, in the country as part of a wider crackdown on street crime is called a clear act of racial discrimination by the European parliament. **A4**



FIGHTING SPIRIT

Kate Conklin suffers from a rare disease that leaves her feeling as if parts of her body are on fire. Yet this weekend she'll be competing in the Amica Ironman 70.3 Rhode Island, with her Warwick grandmother waiting at the finish line. **C1**