

**WOMAN'S HOME
OPEN TO DINERS**
ACCENT, 1D



SIMONE DELATY

**MILITARY BLOCKING
SOLDIERS' NET USAGE**
NATION/WORLD, 3A

**DRAG RACERS
ARE RARE BREED**
SPORTS, 1C



The Gazette

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50 CENTS

Are we embroiled in gas war?

Prices surge, diverge at pumps in E. Iowa

By Dave DeWitte
The Gazette

A gas price war might not seem the most obvious explanation for \$3.04 per gallon gas Monday in Cedar Rapids, but at least one retailer said that's exactly what it was.

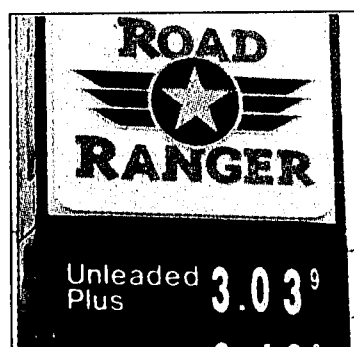
Record highs

■ National average gas prices exceed post-Katrina record, 5B

Gas prices in metro Cedar Rapids were spread across a range of more than 16 cents per gallon on Monday, an unusually wide spread in an industry often accused of moving prices in lockstep.

Selling gas for \$3.04, the Road Ranger on First Avenue NE was flooded with cars

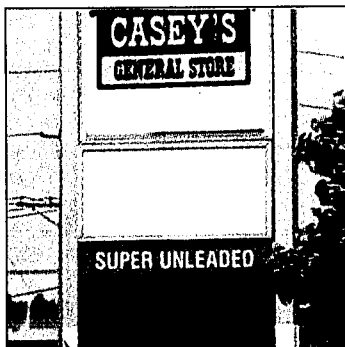
What a spot check of low gasoline prices in the C.R. metro area found at midday Monday



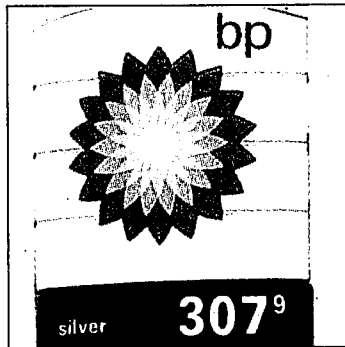
Road Ranger
15th Street
and First Avenue NE



Hawkeye Convenience Store
Wilson Avenue
and Wiley Boulevard SW



Casey's General Store
Edgewood Road
and 37th Avenue SW



BP station
Edgewood Road
and Johnson Avenue NW



Conoco Market Express
Eagleview Drive
and Highway 151, Marion

over the lunch hour, as competitors around it were selling gas at \$3.06.

The Market Express on the east side of Marion wasn't selling much gas under a sign

that read nearly \$3.20 per gallon, about 10 cents higher than its nearest competitor.

Convenience store owner and operator Todd Satterly of Cedar Rapids said he realizes

few people buying gas Monday would believe this statement, but he swears he isn't making it up.

"They're just in a gas war, which is absolutely asinine,"

Satterly said.

Satterly said Road Ranger, which recently acquired area QuikTrip stores, and Casey's General Stores, which acquired the area's biggest con-

venience store chain, Handy-Mart, last year, are eating losses on gas as they compete for customers.

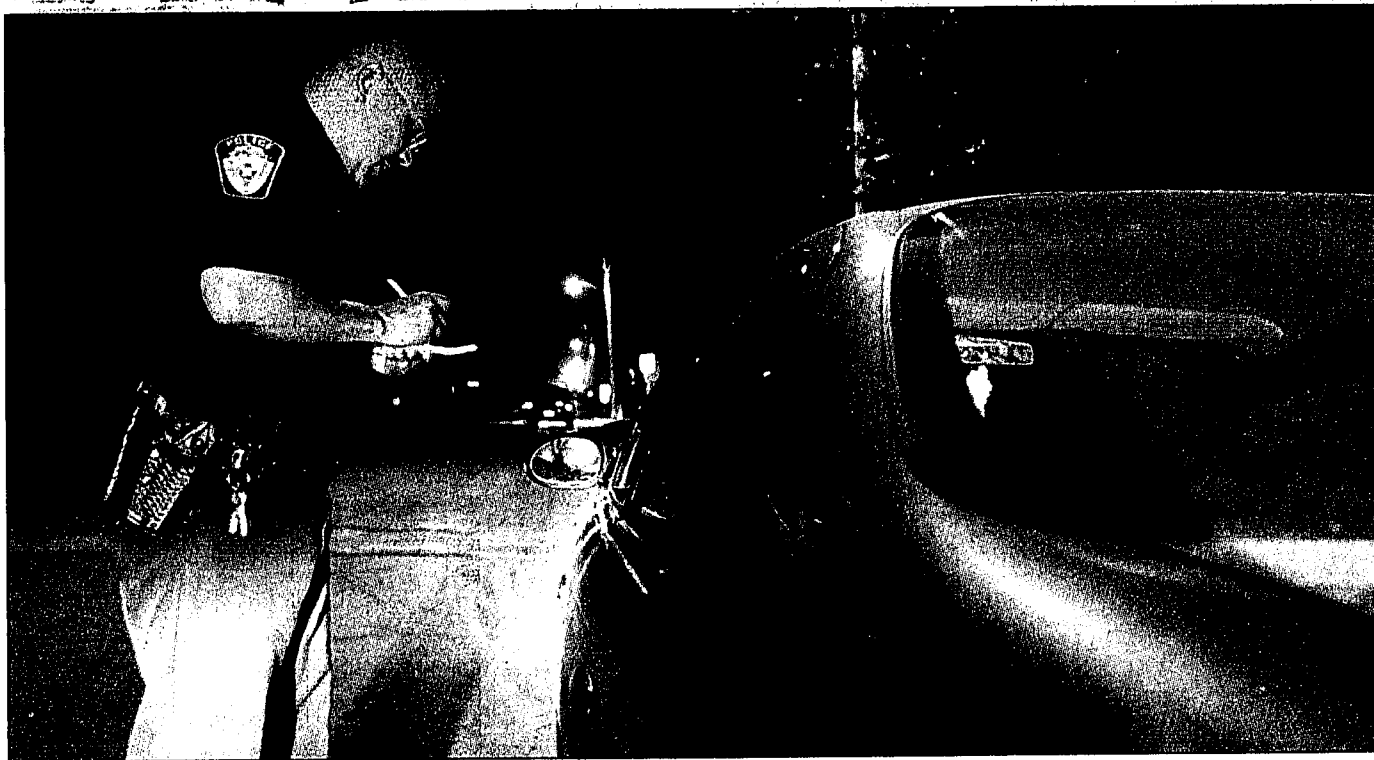
"I don't know why they're

► **GAS, PAGE 6A**

LAW ENFORCEMENT

WANTED: Bilingual officers

Need is growing in Eastern Iowa



Laura Schmitt/The Gazette

West Liberty Police Officer David Lira writes down the name of a driver who was stopped Saturday because his car tag lights were out. The driver, who does not speak English, received a citation for not having a valid driver's license. Lira is fluent in Spanish, which is important in West Liberty, where 40 percent of the population is Hispanic.

Most departments attempt to schedule one Spanish speaker for each work shift

By Adam Belz
The Gazette

Around midnight one day in early April, police at a Cedar Rapids apartment radioed their colleague, Drew Tran, for help.

A Hispanic woman in her mid-20s was crying, hurt and distraught, and officers couldn't figure out what had happened.

Using basic Spanish he learned growing up in Chicago, Tran figured out the woman had been a domestic abuse victim at

another address. She had fled to a friend's apartment and her male attacker still was at the crime scene.

The man was arrested soon after. Tran took the woman's assault report and set a follow-up appointment for her with the County Attorney's Office, all by speaking Spanish.

The need for Spanish-speaking public safety officers in Eastern Iowa is growing.

► **BILINGUAL, PAGE 6A**

On TV

■ Gazette staff writer Adam Belz is scheduled to talk about this story on today's 11 a.m. newscast on KCRG-TV9.

CRIME

'He had a rough life'

C.R. man found in apartment was fatally stabbed, police say

By Christoph Trappe
The Gazette

CEDAR RAPIDS — Dennis First, the 64-year-old slaying victim whose body was found Friday, was in bad health, had some run-ins with the law and, in recent years, had contacted family members again.

But why someone would want to kill him remains in question. No arrest has been made.

"He had a rough life," First's ex-wife,

► **DEATH, PAGE 6A**



Dennis First.
Found dead
Friday

On the Net

■ View Monday's police media briefing on the Dennis First slaying: www.GazetteOnline.com

LIFESTYLE

Women with attitude

Blue Thong Society unites to 'fight frump' with humor and style

By Carly Weber
The Gazette

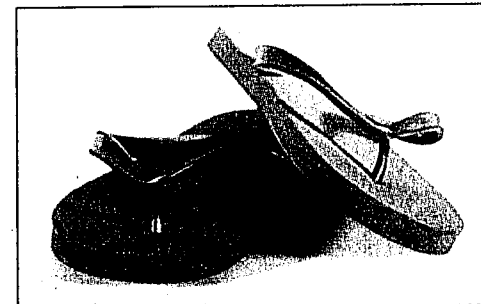
CEDAR RAPIDS — Forget wrinkle creams and yoga.

Four 40- and 50-something friends from San Diego decided a year ago to fight aging with something else — a sense of humor and style.

Their army? The Blue Thong Society. Their battle cry? "Fight frump."

So far, the call to arms has been heard by 1,800 women of all ages in 25 states, Canada and Mexico. Here in Iowa, multiple chapters have popped up in Ankeny, Des Moines, Urbandale, Indianola and most recently in Cedar Rapids.

► **BLUE THONG, PAGE 6A**



Cliff Jette/The Gazette

Blue thongs (whether they be footwear or underwear) are the fashion of choice for members of the Blue Thong Society. Neither thong is mandatory, though.

Blue Thong Society

■ What: Blue Thong Society Cedar Rapids chapter kickoff
■ When: 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. May 22
■ Where: Blend restaurant, 221 Second Ave. SE, Cedar Rapids
■ Information: e_ellen42@msn.com or www.bluethong.society.com

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**TODAY'S
WEATHER**



Thunderstorms, mainly early
TODAY 69 45 10E
WEDNESDAY 66 40

Gas/BP affected by Indiana refinery problems

► FROM PAGE 1A

doing it, but we're doing it to keep from losing customers," Satterly said.

Guppy's on the Go, a small, local, convenience store chain owned by Satterly and his wife, was paying \$3.17 at wholesale for gasoline and selling it for \$3.04 at their convenience store at Edgewood Road and Johnson Avenue NW.

Adding in the 3 percent

Prices in Iowa City

■ Prices also varied widely in Iowa City/Coralville on Monday, from \$3.29.9 at many stations, to \$3.19.9 at the Kum 'n Go on Burlington Street in Iowa City.

processing charge his company pays for credit card purchases, Satterly said he would have to charge customers \$3.26 per gallon just to make

a 3-cent-per-gallon profit.

Supply problems for area BP stations have contributed to the misery of area convenience store operators, according to Satterly, who operates a few stations selling BP branded gas.

Brian Crowe, analyst with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, said BP stations in Eastern Iowa are affected by refining problems at the Whiting Petroleum Refinery in Gary, Ind.

Terminals that supply BP fuel in North Liberty and western Illinois were having trouble getting supplies from the refinery, Crowe said, while BP terminals in Clive and points west are connected to other refineries.

As a result, Crowe said, gasoline ordinarily shipped from locations in Eastern Iowa and western Illinois was being brought in from terminals in Clive and elsewhere.

BP released a statement

Monday saying that it had gained regulatory approval to allow it to load more tankers in Clive beginning today by installing a temporary vapor control unit. The equipment burns vapors that would otherwise be released into the air when tankers are filled.

Steve Brooks, general counsel for Road Ranger, said the company does not comment on its gas pricing policies. Casey's General Stores Inc. did not return a call seeking

comment.

Crowe said the record prices across the nation are due mainly to refining capacity limitations and rising gas demand.

The average price in Cedar Rapids eased off from \$3.20 per gallon on Sunday to \$3.19 on Monday, according to AAA.

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Bilingual/Spanish speakers valued but not recruited

► FROM PAGE 1A

and departments increasingly are valuing Spanish-speaking officers. The skill informally has made Tran the bilingual go-to-guy in his platoon and helped earn him the department's Employee of the Quarter award. He also speaks Vietnamese but uses it far less.

Although most police departments here have no formal program to recruit or train officers who speak Spanish, officers like Tran — who either are fluent or have a working knowledge of Spanish — stay busy.

"We either luck out with a recruit who is fluent or (have) an officer who is willing to pursue that skill," said Cedar Rapids Lt. Chuck Mincks, explaining the department doesn't actively recruit Spanish speakers. "It is becoming more important with the growing Latino population."

Feeling welcome

Alfred Ramirez, director of Diversity Focus in Cedar Rapids, said Hispanics feel welcome and are more likely to invest themselves in a community when some law enforcement officials can speak Spanish.

"If you want to engage communities or neighborhoods, what better way than to communicate with them in their language and enroll them in the process," he said.

Also, lots of obvious practical problems are avoided.

"There's huge implications for somebody's life being impacted just for not understanding or not obeying a command. On that front alone, it's a huge issue," Ramirez said.

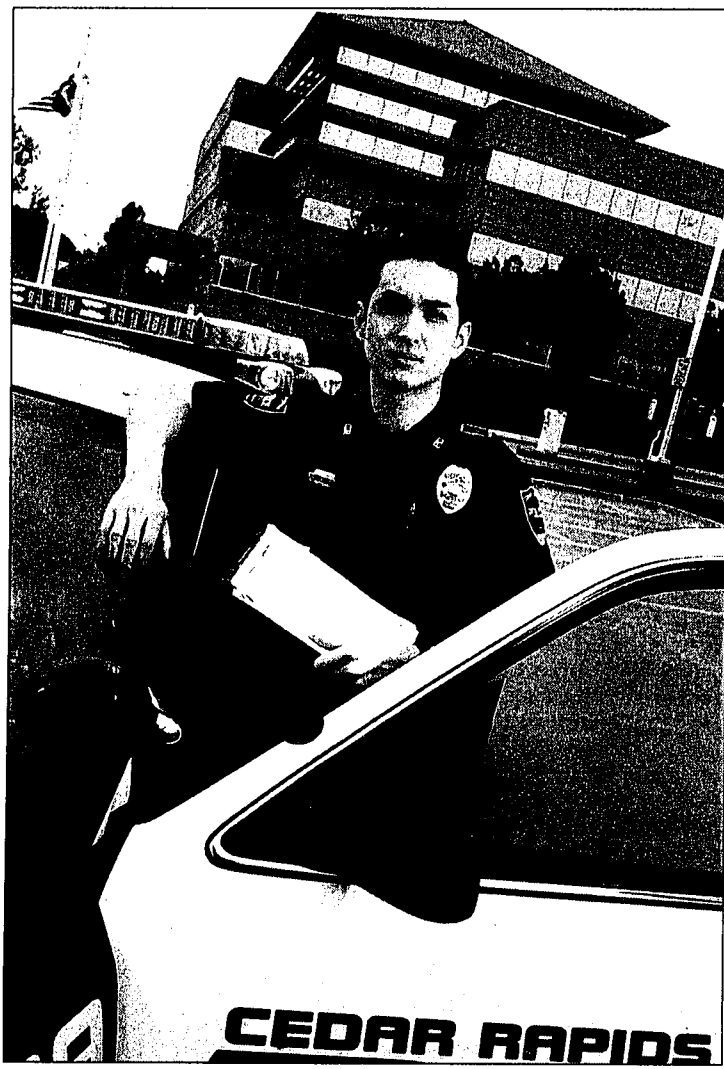
Classes offered

The Iowa State Patrol and the Iowa City, Cedar Rapids and Waterloo police departments use interpreters at times, either

in person or over the phone. They also offer officers voluntary street-level Spanish classes. State troopers occasionally call Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers for translation help.

The Iowa City Police Department tries to keep Spanish-speaking officers available on all shifts because Spanish skills are needed at least every week, Sgt. Troy Kelsay said.

"We have a few officers who



Cedar Rapids Police Officer Drew Tran is the unofficial go-to guy in the department for non-English speaking calls. He speaks Spanish as well as Vietnamese.

By the numbers

■ More than 90,000 Iowans speak Spanish at home.

■ Iowa's Spanish-speaking population increased by more than 30 percent between 2000 and 2005, U.S. Census estimates show.

■ By 2030, Woods & Pool Economics projects, more than 330,000 Latinos will live in Iowa. That will be nearly 10 percent of the state's population, compared with less than 4 percent now.

have Spanish in their background," Kelsay said. "We lean heavily on them."

In Waterloo, the police keep some Bosnian interpreters on call because of the influx of Bosnian immigrants over the past decade. Officers learn a few phrases, but if the conversation goes beyond the basic, police call an interpreter.

Transition aid

Republican state Sen. Mary Lundby of Marion — a town preparing to send a police officer to U.S. marshal's training to help enforce immigration laws there — said courts use translators, so it makes sense for police to as well.

Many immigrants are in a "transition time," she said,

when they're trying to learn English but haven't yet.

"They may need help from police, or police are making an arrest," Lundby said. "It would be helpful for police to know Spanish."

West Liberty

In West Liberty, where 40 percent of the population is Hispanic, Officer David Lira said he uses Spanish "pretty much on a daily basis." Lots of the time that means translating for other officers.

The 40-year-old from Walcott grew up bilingual in Moline, Ill. His father is from

Texas and his mother from Mexico. He took a part-time job at the West Liberty Police Department when he was a conservation officer for Scott County. Now he's full time.

Hispanics are more comfortable with him than with other officers, he said, and that helps him establish rapport with the community.

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Death/Victim lost touch with family

► FROM PAGE 1A

Christine Burmeister of Tipton, told The Gazette on Monday. "It's hard to believe somebody ... (would) stab him. He could hardly get around."

An assistant manager at the apartment complex where First lived said Sunday that First had prostate cancer and was living on Social Security.

Police said they hoped evidence found at First's apartment at 2249 C St. SW helps them catch the killer.

"We're following up our leads and looking at DNA evidence," police Lt. Kenneth Washburn said at a news briefing Monday. He wouldn't be more specific.

Cedar Rapids police said First was stabbed to death within 24 hours of a maintenance worker finding him. Police were called about 7:30 a.m. Friday to his apartment at Hawthorne Hills Apartments.

Police didn't release how many times or where on his body First was stabbed.

First had lived in Cedar Rapids since being divorced in Jones County in the early 1980s.

"He did not deserve to die like this," Burmeister, 63, said. "It's senseless what they

did to him."

About 30 years ago, the Firsts lived in Olin. Dennis and Christine First had two children — Brad, born in 1963, and Laura, born in 1965.

Brad died in an auto accident in 1993. First's daughter, Laura Schroeder of Lowden, has declined to comment on her father's death.

When he lived in Jones County 30 years ago, Dennis First worked as a purchasing agent at a Monticello steel company.

He lost touch with his children, ex-wife and relatives but started calling a few years ago.

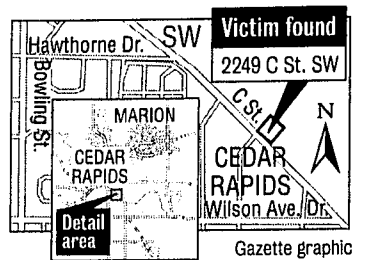
"He never asked for anything," Burmeister said.

Since May 1990, First had been arrested on charges of stealing from local businesses and drunken driving and was accused of threatening a man from whom he rented a room.

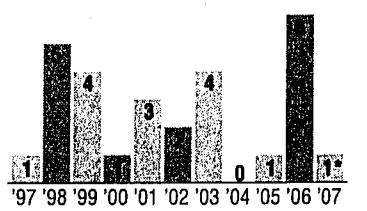
Police had been called five times to First's apartment since Jan. 1: three times for medical calls and twice for disturbances, records show.

Police declined to comment on whether First's troubles in Cedar Rapids appeared to be connected to his death.

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Killings in Cedar Rapids



*Through May 14

Source: Iowa Department of Public Safety, Cedar Rapids police

Gazette graphic

Use of firearms rare in recent C.R. killings

■ Firearms routinely make up the majority of weapons used in killings across Iowa, Iowa Department of Public Safety records show. Not so in Cedar Rapids, The Gazette's review of murders shows. Since Jan. 1, 2005, one of the eight people murdered in the city was shot. The others were either beaten, strangled or stabbed.

■ In comparison, 47 percent of the state's murders in 2005 were committed with a firearm. Cutting instruments made up almost 16 percent, and hands, fists or feet, 21 percent.

Blue Thong/C.R. chapter organizing

► FROM PAGE 1A

"Iowa is just crazy for blue thong," said Jackie Tushinsky, 51, one of the society's founding members, speaking from her home in San Diego. "Forget about this embracing aging crap. We are fighting and defying aging."

Formed over a glass of Chardonnay after the second of the founders turned 50, the Blue Thongs see themselves as an alternative to the Red Hat Society, Tushinsky said.

Instead of the latter's signature red and purple accessories, these ladies have blue thongs. It's up to each member whether the thongs are of the shoe or underwear variety. Neither is mandatory.

Other than the \$29 per-person annual membership fee, which goes to the founders for administrative costs, chapter membership is low-maintenance. Groups don't elect officers, meetings are informal and are open to all



Ellen Feller
Organizing chapter's kickoff

attractive, be fashionable and have a good time."

Feller envisions that the group will attend plays, gather for drinks and listen to live music. She's been mulling over naming the chapter "True Blue Divas."

"It's got the word blue and the word diva, which is a kind of an indication of what the group's about," she said. "I'm excited. I'm hoping that we have ladies from all ages. The more the merrier."

While there is plenty of time for chatting while sip-

women, as long as they're at least 21.

ping one of the group's signature drinks, a Blue Thongrita or Thongatini, the society is more than just social. Each chapter is tasked with identifying local charitable organizations to support.

"It's a social club with a philanthropic aspect ... a perfect way to network and do something good for the community," said Feller, who lives in Cedar Rapids one week and Des Moines the next.

Her living arrangement has made it hard to forge friendships in either city, so Feller is starting the group with hopes that it will help her connect with other women.

"I don't work in Cedar Rapids; I don't have children in school. I can't attend something regularly, like an exercise class," Feller said. "There's a niche there for our age group that's not being met."

■ Contact the writer: (319) 398-5853 or carly.weber@gazettecommunications.com

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