

Nation

From wire reports

Seven-year-old girl still missing in North Florida

ORANGE PARK, Fla. — A daylong search for a missing 7-year-old North Florida girl who vanished on her way home from school Monday has produced more than 150 leads, but the child remained missing Tuesday afternoon and officials said they suspect foul play.

More than 100 Clay County deputies, law enforcement officers from neighboring counties, the FBI and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement scoured a residential Orange Park neighborhood looking for Somer Thompson.



Thompson

Somer was last seen about 2:45 p.m. Monday heading home from Grove Park Elementary School. She was walking with her sister and some friends, but ran ahead of them after they had a spat, detectives said.

Couple sentenced: A young couple who dropped rocks onto Interstate 5 near Tacoma, Wash., as part of a sex game entered guilty pleas and were sentenced to four years in prison. Eighteen-year-old Amanda L. Madison and 24-year-old Joshua N. Sizemore entered pleas Tuesday in Pierce County Superior Court to assault and malicious mischief charges. They dropped rocks from an overpass May 25, hitting 14 cars including a State Patrol vehicle. One man suffered a bruised arm. It began as a game in which they took off clothes depending on headlights being out.

Bridge blocked: A 47-year-old woman who was considering jumping Tuesday from a San Diego bridge has surrendered, about 8½ hours after police negotiators closed a major downtown freeway and caused traffic to back up for miles. Police said the woman climbed on top of a chain-link cage covering the sides of the bridge. He says she considered jumping and remained there, some 60 feet above the freeway, until finally coming down and surrendering to police.

Enrollment up: U.S. medical school enrollment is up for the 11th consecutive year as colleges seek to meet a growing demand for physicians. First-year enrollment climbed 2 percent over 2008, and now totals nearly 18,400 students. The number of applicants remained mostly stable at around 42,000. Four new medical schools opened their doors this year; several others expanded class size.



AP File Photo

Shoppers pass Macy's in New York last November. On Tuesday, Chicago-based research firm ShopperTrak said it is forecasting that total holiday sales will rise 1.6 percent compared with a year ago, which would reverse last year's steep decline.

ShopperTrak forecasts slight holiday sales rise

NEW YORK (AP) — ShopperTrak, a retail research firm, predicted Tuesday that total holiday sales will rise 1.6 percent compared with a year ago, which would be good news for retailers compared with last year's steep decline.

The research firm also expects a 4.2 percent decline in foot traffic from last year's holidays.

Last year, holiday sales fell 5.9 percent while foot traffic dropped 15.4 percent, according to ShopperTrak estimates. The research firm tracks customer traffic at more than 45,000 stores.

The holiday sales estimate is a bit rosier than other forecasts offered over the past few weeks,

which have been at best no better than unchanged from last year's debacle. The holiday 2008 season saw the biggest sales decline in at least several decades.

The National Retail Federation, usually bullish about holiday sales, predicts a 1 percent decline in total sales to \$437.6 billion for November and December combined.

"The consumer is just tired" of all the bad news, said Bill Martin, co-founder of ShopperTrak, based in Chicago. He added that shoppers have pulled back from buying sweaters and other purchases over the past year and are looking to refill their closets, though spending will be tempered.

GM: 15 vehicles returned under money-back program

NEW YORK (AP) — Just a tiny fraction of General Motors customers have returned their cars for refunds under the automaker's heavily advertised money-back guarantee program — and most buyers aren't even choosing to participate in the plan, opting for a rebate instead.

About 400 vehicle buyers, or "less than 1 percent" of sales since the program launched, have signed up for GM's 60-day money-back guarantee program, spokesman Tom Henderson said Tuesday. The rest took a \$500 rebate, he said.

Of those 400 vehicles, just 15 have been returned in the four days since customers could begin doing so, Henderson said.

GM launched the money-back

guarantee program on Sept. 14 with an advertising blitz, including TV spots starring GM chairman Ed Whitacre, in a bid to get on-the-fence vehicle buyers to consider GM products after its stint in bankruptcy court this summer.

The program runs through Nov. 30 and allows customers to return any new 2009 and 2010 Chevrolet, Cadillac, GMC or Buick vehicle for a refund of the purchase price and sales tax if they are unsatisfied with their vehicle.

The policy allows buyers to return their vehicle between day 31 and day 60 of ownership, meaning the first refund requests started coming in on Thursday. Reasons for the returns have been "across the board," Henderson said.

In surprise decision, Vatican seeks to lure disaffected Anglicans

VATICAN CITY (AP) — The Vatican is making it easier for Anglicans to convert to Roman Catholicism — a surprise move designed to entice traditionalists opposed to women priests, openly gay clergy and the blessing of same-sex unions.

The decision, reached in secret by a small cadre of Vatican officials, was sure to add to the problems of the 77-million-strong Anglican Communion as it seeks to deal with deep doctrinal divisions that threaten a permanent schism among its faithful.

The change means conservative Anglicans from around the world will be able to join the Catholic church while retaining aspects of their Anglican liturgy and identity, including married priests. Until now, disaffected Anglicans had joined the church primarily on a case-by-case basis.

"The unity of the church does not require a uniformity that ignores cultural diversity, as the history of Christianity shows," said Cardinal William Levada, head of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in announcing the decision.

The spiritual leader of the global Anglican church, Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, was not consulted about the change and was informed only hours before the announcement. He nevertheless tried to downplay the significance and said it wasn't a Vatican commentary on Anglican problems.

"It has no negative impact on the relations of the communion as a whole to the Roman Catholic Church as a whole," he said in London.

The decision could undermine decades of talks between the Vatican and Anglican leaders over how they could possibly reunite. Although Levada insisted such discussions remain a priority, the Vatican move could be taken as a signal that the ultimate goal of ecumenical talks is to convert Anglicans to Catholicism.

Still, the decision confirmed Pope Benedict XVI's design of creating a unified,

tradition-minded Catholic church — a goal he outlined at the start of his pontificate and has been steadily implementing ever since.

This drive also involved a recent move to rehabilitate four excommunicated ultra-conservative bishops, including one who denied the full extent of the Holocaust, in a bid to bring their faithful back under the Vatican's wing.

Levada made the announcement hours after briefing Williams and Catholic bishops in London about the decision. Notably, no one from the Vatican's ecumenical office on relations with Anglicans attended; Levada said he had invited representatives but they said they were all away from Rome.

Austen Ivereigh, a former adviser to the Catholic archbishop of Westminster, called the Vatican announcement historic because it allowed for the "gradual absorption into the Catholic church of huge numbers of Anglicans," who are conservative in their theology and liturgy.

Until now, Anglicans had been allowed to join the church primarily on an individual basis. With the new provision, groups of Anglicans from around the world will be able to join new parishes headed by former Anglican prelates, who will provide spiritual guidance to Anglicans who wish to be Catholic. Called personal ordinariates, they will be established within local Catholic dioceses.

The new provision also allows married Anglican priests and even seminarians to become ordained Catholic priests — much the same way that Eastern rite priests who are in communion with Rome are allowed to be married. However, married Anglicans cannot become Catholic bishops.

A model for the future exists in the United States, where a handful of such parishes function — including three in Texas — thanks to a 1980 Vatican decision to accommodate Episcopal faithful and priests who wanted to convert.

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Sugar cereals are 'Smart Choices?' FDA not so sure

WASHINGTON (AP) — Ever wondered how that "Smart Choices" sticker wound up on the front of Froot Loops or Cocoa Puffs?

Well, federal health officials are having similar thoughts, and they're warning food manufacturers.

The Food and Drug Administration said Tuesday that nutritional logos from food manufacturers may be misleading

consumers about the actual health benefits of cereal, crackers and other processed foods. The agency sent a letter to companies saying it will begin cracking down on inaccurate food labeling. The FDA did not name specific products or give a timeline for enforcement.

U.S. manufacturers, including Kellogg, Kraft Foods and General Mills, rolled out their so-called

Smart Choices program last year, amid growing concern about obesity rates. The green labels appear on the front of foods that meet certain standards for calories per serving and fat content.

But consumer advocates complain about lax standards for the program, with logos appearing on everything from frozen sweets to sugary cereals.

"There are products that have gotten the Smart

Choices check mark that are almost 50 percent sugar," FDA commissioner Margaret Hamburg said during a call with reporters.

The agency is developing proposed nutritional standards that would have to be met before manufacturers place such claims on their packages, Hamburg said. She added that she hoped industry would cooperate with the FDA to develop standardized "labeling that all Americans can trust and use to build better diets."

Mike Hughes, chairman of the Smart Choices Program, said in a statement that Smart Choices is based on the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

"We believe in the science behind the Smart Choices program," he said. "We also look forward to the opportunity to partici-



A box of Kellogg's Pops breakfast cereal is pictured with a "Smart Choices" green check mark printed on its front.

part in FDA's initiatives on front-of-package labeling."

The FDA plans to research whether one particular approach would make it easier for consumers to select healthy foods.

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