

■ **Continued from Page 8A**
100 signatures needed to put the tax on a ballot next year. The tax would pay for police, fire and other services in Colma, which was just another farming town until 1914, when neighboring San Francisco banned public cemeteries because its land was too valuable to be handed over to the dead.

But the plan has already stirred controversy in a town where the vast majority of the population is buried beneath it. The dead, including Wyatt Earp, William Randolph Hearst and Levi Strauss, outnumber the living roughly 1,000-to-one, and cemeteries occupy three-quarters of the town's 2.2 square miles.

"The idea of raiding the general fund that maintains a cemetery is sacrilege," said Steve Doukas, general manager of Greek Orthodox Memorial Park and Greenlawn Memorial Park.

Not to mention illegal. Doukas, who chairs the state's cemetery board, said state law protects cemeteries from assessments. "If

the petition passes, it would be in court immediately," he said.

Still, Simcox persists. What angers him most is that cemetery owners, while avoiding local taxes, have been the harshest critics of a proposed poker room that could be a windfall for Colma, population 1,000.

A 43-table card room, approved by voters in May, remains unbuilt, and legal appeals will probably further delay or even block the project, Simcox said. He figures the gambling hall could bring the city \$8 million a year.

As for the grave tax, the town's 16 cemeteries would suffer, Doukas said, and would have trouble keeping lawns mowed and fertilized, and private roads maintained.

But Doukas said voter approval is unlikely.

"This is a town built by cemeteries," he said. "They've created a nice, safe environment for families, areas for people to walk through, to bike through, where children can feed the ducks."

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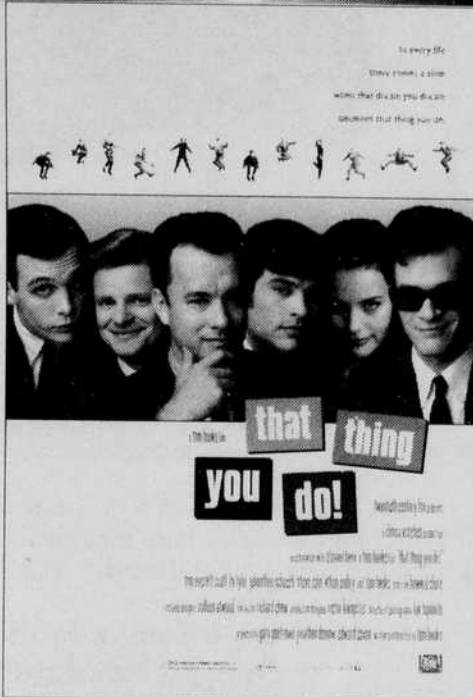
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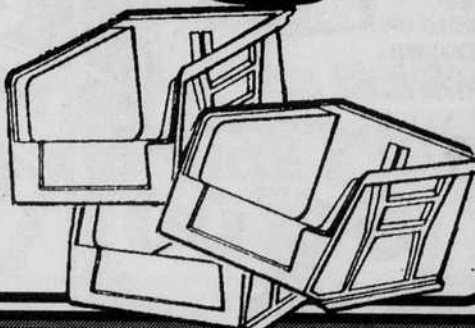
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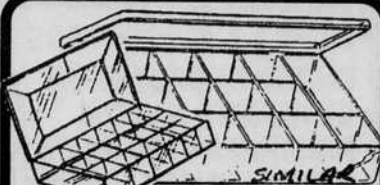
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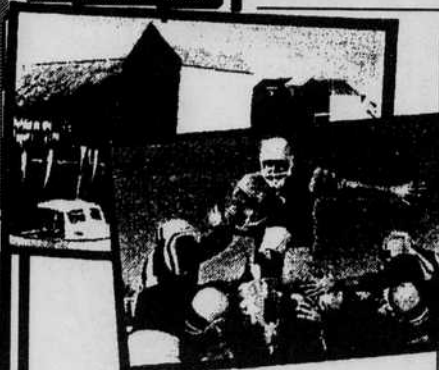
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