

STRANGER THAN FICTION

Unabomber attempts suicide in his cell

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Unabomber suspect Theodore Kaczynski tried to hang himself with his underwear in his cell overnight, authorities said.

Sacramento County Under-sheriff Lou Blanas confirmed the suicide attempt had taken place. Courtroom observers said red marks were visible on Kaczynski's neck during an abbreviated court session today, but no mention of the attempt was made in court.

Kaczynski arrived at the federal courthouse this morning without his underwear, Blanas said.

"We searched his cell. We can't find his underwear. We assume they were flushed down the toilet," Blanas said.

Blanas said Kaczynski would be placed on 24-hour watch in a cell monitored by a remote-controlled camera.

"He's been a model prisoner for the last 18 months," Blanas said.

Unidentified flaming object falls into river

KENNEWICK, Wash. — A ball of fire trailing orange and red flames that a woman reported seeing splash into the Columbia River may have been a meteor, Pasco police said Thursday after investigating.

"We just took a little curiosity look at it to make sure it wasn't a plane going down," said Capt. Doug Chambers. "The airport didn't report seeing anything on its radar, and no one else reported anything."

Another police officer said he saw a meteor shower around 10 p.m. Wednesday, Chambers said. But that officer did not see anything fall to the ground, he said.

Judy Smiley said she was dri-

ving east through Kennewick's Columbia Park when she saw the object fall from the sky around 9:55 p.m. Wednesday. She said it was nearly as big as her Chevy Cavalier.

"It was fast, real fast," Smiley said. "It splashed the water up ... I'm going, 'I can't believe this.'"

Smiley said she was headed home from a friend's house Wednesday night when she saw a light in the sky to the east.

"I slowed down and watched it," Smiley said. "It started coming straight down. It was going right in front of me almost."

After about a minute of watching, the light was coming in faster and she saw the flames.

"I slammed on my breaks," she said, and the object then pounded into the river.

Feline puppet dispute causes legal cat fight

FAIRFAX, Va. — The white gloves have come off as two Washington-area manners mavens fight each other in a most uncivil lawsuit over the rights to "Eticat," a feline puppet used to teach children etiquette.

Dorothea Johnson accuses a former employee, Jere Hathaway Wright, of swiping the puppet idea and starting a competing operation schooling children in the finer points of polite society.

"All I can say is I believe I was there first," Wright said in a huff as she clutched the purple-and-black puppet outside a Fairfax County courtroom Wednesday.

Johnson is seeking to bar Wright from using the Eticat name. She also wants up to \$10,000 in damages. A judge who heard two days of testimony is expected to rule in February.

Wright was broke and looking for work five years ago when Johnson hired her as a consul-

tant for The Protocol School of Washington, Johnson said.

She claims she was working on an idea to use a cat puppet in her children's etiquette classes when Wright came on board in 1993. The project was called Eticat and was outlined in confidential documents she kept in her office, Johnson testified.

Although her lawyer calls it theft, Johnson puts her allegation more politely: "Miss Wright misappropriated my idea."

The unpleasantness began early on, Johnson said, when she overheard Wright make some rather indecorous remarks about Johnson's table manners.

"I myself eat in the continental style, and Miss Wright would poke fun by saying: 'I don't eat in that fancy continental style. I eat good old-fashioned American,'" Johnson said.

The cat fight began in earnest after Wright left The Protocol School in 1994.

The next year, Wright tried to register Eticat with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Johnson found out, and filed her own trademark application for "Catherine the Eticat." She testified she named the puppet after her niece's beloved pet.

Both trademark applications are on hold pending the outcome of the lawsuit.

The irony of two proper ladies raising their hackles over a puppet is not lost on either woman.

"We were supposedly friends. I was just devastated," when Johnson sued, Wright said outside the courtroom.

Johnson said Wright left her no room for niceties. "She was not only impolite, she was rude, crude and unacceptable," Johnson said.

—Compiled from AP wire reports

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