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**COMFORT:** Nicole Hart, left, of Burbank and Taryn Davis of San Marcos, Texas, console each other during a gathering of the American Widow Project in Santa Monica. The crosses on the beach were set up by a group of veterans to honor U.S. war dead.

## Brought together by grief

Forlorn young war widows find one another through the Internet.

By PALOMA ESQUIVEL  
Times Staff Writer

**W**HEN a married soldier dies, the military removes his wedding band to send to his widow. Taryn Davis of San Marcos, Texas, learned this just after her husband, Army Cpl. Michael W. Davis, was killed last year by a roadside bomb in Iraq. His widow, 22, rushed to contact the casualty assistance officer assigned to help her, begging him to make sure the ring never came off his finger. He promised her he'd keep it on.

When a married soldier dies, his belongings are shipped home in black boxes. Every piece of clothing is washed and folded, every movie and CD put in a white case, every picture stacked in a plastic bag. Beth Tomczak, 23, of Fort Bragg, N.C., didn't know the Army would do this until she got the boxes holding the belongings of her husband, Staff Sgt. Zachary B. Tomczak. She had hoped to get his things as he had left them.

There is no official list of U.S. war widows, but there are thousands — nearly half of the 4,155 soldiers killed in Iraq and Afghanistan were married. Most of the dead were young, as are the women they left behind.

Over the weekend, Tomczak, Davis and a few other military widows, all in



**GRIEF:** Beth Tomczak, left, of Fort Bragg, N.C., and Angelee Lombardi of Flagstaff, Ariz., mourn their husbands.

their 20s, gathered in a rented beach house in Santa Monica.

The women, who found one another on the Internet and come from cities across the country, talk nearly every day. They share their experiences, including

planning funerals, figuring out what to do with their husbands' things, and dealing with relatives who don't know what it is to be 20 and a widow.

Davis — who founded the group now called the American Widow Project — Tomczak and Nicole Hart of Burbank, whose husband, David, was killed in Iraq this year, are featured in an online documentary called "We Regret to Inform You." It premieres tonight in Culver City.

Later this month, the women will take their stories across the country. In a rented RV, they will travel to military bases, trying to find other young widows, hoping to spare them a bit of the overwhelming loneliness, isolation and helplessness that they felt in the weeks and months after their husbands died.

Davis, after hearing that her husband had died, spent weeks on the couch in the home she had shared with him. She refused to eat, refused to get up.

"Everybody went back to their day-to-day life, and I found myself not getting better," she said. "I knew there were others like me. I wanted to know their stories. I wanted to know how they met their husbands; I wanted to know what gets them up every day."

She spent hours on the Internet, looking for resources and coming up short. There are several war widows organizations, but most are advocacy groups whose base of support is older [See War widows, Page B6]

## Crime rate higher for deportees

Study finds that in L.A. County, 75% of illegal immigrant inmates who return engage in criminal activity again.

By ANNA GORMAN  
Times Staff Writer

Illegal immigrants who have been deported at least once from the United States are far more likely than other immigrants to repeatedly commit crimes, according to a study by the nonprofit Rand Corp.

The data indicated that illegal immigrants, overall, were not a greater crime risk, according to the study, which looked at all inmates released from Los Angeles County Jail for a month in 2002.

But among those who previously had been deported, reentered the U.S. and were arrested and released from jail, nearly 75% went on to commit another crime within a year. And 28% were arrested three or more times during the one-year period.

The recidivism rate was much lower for illegal immigrants who had not been previously deported, with 32% of those inmates being rearrested within a year and 7% arrested three or more times during that year.

Since the data were collected in 2002, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department has overhauled screening for illegal immigrants and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security has poured resources into border security. But researchers said the analysis still could have public policy implications for L.A. County and other counties around the nation.

"If you are trying to target people who are repeatedly cycled through the criminal justice system, this looks like a good risk marker," said author Laura Hickman, a researcher at Portland State University. "It doesn't make sense to just sweep up all deportable aliens, but to focus resources on the group who are at the most risk for committing new crimes in the community."

The authors acknowledged that the study was limited because they couldn't determine the immigration status of many of the inmates and others may have falsely claimed U.S. birth. As a result, the study limited its analysis to 517 male illegal immigrants released from Los Angeles County jails between Aug. 4 and Sept. 2, 2002.

Law enforcement authorities said the report, published online this summer in the jour-

nal Crime & Delinquency, underscores their ongoing efforts to target illegal immigrants who have been ordered deported or removed from the United States. But L.A. County Sheriff Lee Baca said the report also shows that the federal government needs to do more to stop criminals from sneaking back across the U.S.-Mexico border.

"Criminals who are illegal immigrants know no limits and no boundaries," he said. "The harder we make it for them to get across, the better."

The Los Angeles County Jail began working with federal immigration agents in 2006 to screen foreign-born inmates [See Deportees, Page B6]

## Long Beach 911 cell calls lag

By RICH CONNELL  
Times Staff Writer

Kyon Salaam and his mother were pulled to the street corner in their north Long Beach neighborhood by a violent crash. Two cars had slammed together in rush hour traffic. Assessing the scene, Salaam instinctively punched 911 into his cellphone — and got a recording.

He hung up and dialed again. Stuck listening to the same message, he waited, concerned about a middle-age woman in one car who appeared hurt.

"She was scared ... she couldn't turn off her engine," recalled Salaam, 25, a care worker at a home for the disabled.

His mother hurried back to her nearby condo, dialed 911 on a land-line phone and quickly got through to city dispatchers.

Salaam said he held on minute after minute, and finally gave up on his call after Long Beach police and fire units arrived and took the injured woman away. "It was crazy," he recalled recently. "It could have been a life-or-death situation."

Long Beach, the state's fifth biggest city, with roughly 492,000 residents, promotes itself as a major draw for conven-

[See 911, Page B6]

## GEORGE SKELTON CAPITOL JOURNAL

### Allow a majority budget vote at last

**D**on't blame Democrats for the record-long budget stalemate that is forcing the state to stiff private suppliers, community colleges and healthcare centers for the poor.

They've tried to compromise, agreeing to cut programs for schools, welfare families and the impoverished aged, blind and disabled. They're even willing to accept some of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's budget "reforms."

Don't blame Republicans either. They're being asked by the governor to break their pledges — however misguided they were — not to raise taxes.

Moreover, most are philosophically opposed to taxing people more — particularly during a recession — and are sticking to their principles. That's supposed to be an admirable trait.

And Schwarzenegger? The Republican governor has little clout with GOP lawmakers and seems incapable of eliciting any of their votes. But give him credit: He did recently offer a revised budget proposal — including a one-cent sales tax increase and deeper program cuts — that could provide the framework for probably the best, most honest deal anyone's going to get.

No, don't blame the politicians, at least not entirely. The chief culprit is that archaic demon: the required two-thirds majority vote for passage of a budget.

It's a good bet that 51% of the Legislature would have voted for a budget by now — maybe even had one in place for the July 1 start of the

[See Skelton, Page B6]

## In California



FRANCINE ORR Los Angeles Times

### Making music with his hands

In a workshop behind his home in El Sereno, Cesar Augusto Castro Gonzalez crafts instruments vital to the folk music from his native Veracruz, Mexico, which he has been obsessed with since his youth. Page B2

### Truckers, port going to court

The L.A.-Long Beach complex and the largest trucking group will face off in a dispute over the clean air plan. Page B3

### LAPD watching out for dumpers

A task force is cracking down on those who illegally toss refuse in areas south of the Santa Monica Freeway. Page B4

### Al Martinez

A husband's couch-potato days are over while he attends to the needs of his ailing wife. Page B3

### Actress in early Oscar winner dies

Anita Page, who starred in 1929's "The Broadway Melody," was 98. Page B7

### Lottery: Page B4

### Obituaries: Page B7

### Weather: Page B8

## Does affirmative action help or hurt lawyers?

Professor seeks state bar exam data to study racial bias. Bar says no.

By CAROL J. WILLIAMS  
Times Staff Writer

In his 19 years as a law professor at UCLA, Richard Sander has pondered a nagging question: Does affirmative action help or hinder African Americans who want to become lawyers?

Two years ago, he published research suggesting that racial preferences at law firms might be responsible for black lawyers' high rate of attrition and difficulty making partner. He

hypothesized that in the interest of promoting diversity, law firms sometimes hired black lawyers who were underqualified, and that when there was a "credentials gap" between black and white lawyers at a firm, black lawyers often were less likely to advance and more likely to leave the firm.

The research stirred debate throughout the legal community, and Sander said he was surprised at the vehemence with which people attacked his motives. A former Volunteers in Service to America participant, fair-housing activist and campaigner for Chicago's first black mayor, Sander, who is white, insisted he was simply trying to examine an impor-

[See Lawyers, Page B5]