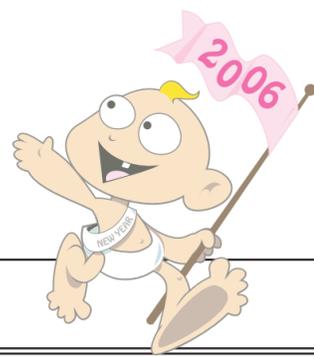


Muskegon Chronicle

DECEMBER 29, 2005 • MUSKEGON, MICHIGAN • 34 PAGES • 50 CENTS



MAYHEM GUARD BREAKS SLUMP Sports 1C



RING IN NEW YEAR WITH STYLE

max 1D
Entertainment section

Thursday

Petition sparks debate over ballot laws



Photo • Associated Press

The Michigan Board of State Canvassers listen and respond on Dec. 7 to petitioners attempting to get their anti-affirmative action proposal on the ballot.

By Tim Martin
ASSOCIATED PRESS

LANSING — Accusations that some affirmative action supporters were misled into signing petitions to put an anti-affirmative action proposal on the ballot have sparked a debate over what petition circulators can say and who should oversee their efforts.

Michigan Civil Rights Initiative leader Jennifer Gratz says the ballot campaign set the standard for petition drives in its thoroughness and compliance with Michigan law. Her group objects to the suggestion that it used a gray area of the law to its advantage, saying critics have raised baseless allegations to keep the measure off the ballot.

The group's proposal, which appears headed for the November 2006 ballot, would ban the use of race and gender preferences in university admissions and government hiring. Gratz's group submitted more than 500,000 voter signatures for its effort, far more than the 317,757 required by state law to qualify for the ballot.

Critics, including the pro-affirmative action group

By Any Means Necessary, say Gratz's group gathered an undetermined number of those signatures by tricking voters into signing petitions they thought would protect affirmative action.

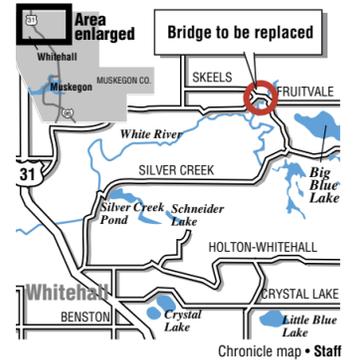
The state Court of Appeals said a state elections board doesn't have the authority to investigate BAMN's claims. Officials with the secretary of state's office recommended that the petitions be certified as valid, and the court ordered the issue onto the ballot.

BAMN now is appealing to the Michigan Supreme Court in hopes of sparking a broader investigation. Even if its efforts are successful, critics would have to prove that about 37 percent of the ballot signatures are invalid to keep the measure off the ballot.

The Michigan Civil Rights Commission plans to have a Jan. 11 hearing on claims that some voters were misled. The commission, which has passed a resolution opposing the initiative, stops short of calling its proceedings an investigation.

But Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm says the

Please see **PETITION 4A** ▶



Chronicle map • Staff

County to rebuild crumbling bridge

By Steve Gunn
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Frosty January seems like an odd time to replace a bridge.

But the Muskegon County Road Commission, using a hired contractor, is about to do just that at County Line Bridge, a 120-foot section of Fruitvale Road that spans the White River in Blue Lake Township.

The bridge will close Jan. 4 for complete reconstruction. Traffic will be detoured until the end of April, when the project is expected to be finished.

The detour, affecting east-west traffic, will be Holton-Whitehall Road to Russell Road and back to Fruitvale Road just east of the bridge, said Paul Bouman, the county highway engineer.

Snowmobile operators who use the bridge to cross the river might have to go north to Oceana County for another crossing point, Bouman said.

There are several reasons for starting the project at this cold time of year, said Ken Hulka, managing director of the road commission.

The first is avoiding the summer tourist season. The second is a permit from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, which says the road commission has to be out of the river by the end of April, so the work doesn't interfere with fish reproduction cycles, he said.

"These are probably not ideal conditions for the contractor, but it's doable, and it will have the least impact on the river and the people who use the bridge," Hulka said.

The County Line Bridge will be completely rebuilt because of structural deterioration.

The bridge has worn down to the point where the road commission has been forced to put tough weight restrictions on its use, keeping some large commercial trucks away. Further wear might have kept other large vehicles, such as school buses and firetrucks, off the bridge as well.

The County Line Bridge project is the largest piece of a \$2 million road commission bridge upgrade project, which was funded with a special bond

Please see **BRIDGE 4A** ▶

Web program broadcasts local issues to areas around the world

By Dave Alexander
CHRONICLE BUSINESS EDITOR

A little slice of cyberspace was carved out for Muskegon when a Web designer developed an Internet program believed to be the first locally produced "podcast."

So, what's a podcast?

Podcasts are relatively new audio and video programming on the Internet that allows users to access the shows when they want and transfer the audio or video files to portable listening and viewing devices, such as an Apple iPod.

There are millions of podcasts being produced around the world and put on the Internet from traditional media outlets, such as NBC News and National Public Radio, to individuals wanting to talk about obscure topics. Podcasts have grown from two dozen in September 2004 to more than 100 million today, according to Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia.

One of those new podcasts was launched in November by Jason Piasecki, president of Imagequest Design in Muskegon.

His "Inside Muskegon" weekly audio podcast had more than 500 Internet listeners or downloaders in the first three weeks. Although most listeners of the 30-minute program of interviews on Muskegon topics are expected to be from West Michigan, "Inside Muskegon" can be heard in New York, Berlin and Tokyo, thanks to the worldwide reach of the Internet.

Development of the podcast was driven by Piasecki's desire to get the "word out" on Muskegon. And then there was his curiosity about how the new technology works and how it might be applied to Imagequest clients — businesses from Southeast and West Michigan.

"I'm figuring this out as I go. I am not a professional journalist," said

Please see **PODCAST 4A** ▶

■ "New media" terms

Web site: The basic format of the Internet that combines graphics, text and audio and video files to provide information or entertainment to those who visit.

Blog: Short for "Weblog," it's a personal journal on the Internet in which people — obscure and famous — discuss topics of their interest.

Podcast: Means of distributing audio and video files on the Internet for on-demand listening and viewing, or storage for later use.

Podcatchers: Web sites that collect and deliver podcast feeds.

MP3: The standard audio format of the Internet.

■ Muskegon goes global

"Inside Muskegon" is a weekly 30-minute audio podcast featuring interviews with Muskegon community and business leaders. New shows are released every Monday. Users can download the program from the "Inside Muskegon" Web site onto their computers or portable listening and viewing devices, such as Apple iPods.

■ On the 'Net

Here's where to find more information:

• **Imagequest:** www.imagequestdesign.com

• **Jason Piasecki's blog:** www.imagequestdesign.com/blog/

• **Inside Muskegon:** www.insidemuskegon.com

• **Podcatching sites:**
www.iTunes.com
www.odeo.com
www.podnova.com

Podcasting in Muskegon

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Chronicle illustration • Linda DeVoogd

The video podcast comes into view as companies dabble in portable fun

By Allan Hoffman
NEWHOUSE NEWS SERVICE

Video for the iPod means more than \$1.99 episodes of "Dragnet" or "Desperate Housewives."

When Apple announced its video iPod in October, all the hoopla was about paying a couple of bucks for TV shows to watch on the iPod's color screen. But as companies and consumers have begun to experiment with the portable entertainment device, something

exciting is emerging — a proliferation of free video.

Educational software companies, purveyors of grass-roots news shows and even PBS are making video clips available for free with the video iPod in mind. But the fun isn't limited to owners of video iPods. Because easy-to-use video technology is built into Apple's popular iTunes software for Macintosh and Windows, the video also is available for viewing on the computer.

Video on iTunes isn't much different from music. Just as you can buy tunes for 99 cents at the iTunes Music Store — part of the free iTunes software — you also can buy videos for \$1.99. And, just as the iTunes software lets you download free music, in the form of podcasts, you also can download free video with iTunes' podcasting capabilities.

With video podcasts, also called vodcasts as well as

Please see **VOCAST 4A** ▶

Tonight's weather



Mostly Cloudy

High **35** Low **28**

Forecast on Page 2A.

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Nissan concept car turns automobile into futuristic video arcade

By John O'Dell
LOS ANGELES TIMES

Gentlemen, start your video games.

Nissan Motor Co. next month will unveil at Detroit's auto show a concept sports car, called the Urge, equipped with Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox 360 video game system.

When the car is parked, the steering wheel, gas and brake pedals and a 7-inch liquid crystal display screen that drops from the rearview mirror function together as a personal video arcade so the driver can play the "Project Gotham Racing 3" game.

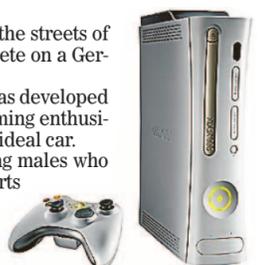
The car-racing game, which works only when the Urge is sta-

tionary, allows players to virtually speed through the streets of London, Tokyo, Las Vegas, New York and to compete on a German test track.

Nissan designer Bruce Campbell said the car was developed after an Internet survey asked young auto and gaming enthusiasts the kinds of features they would want in their ideal car.

Most of the nearly 2,000 respondents were young males who overwhelmingly wanted "a small, fun-to-drive sports car (with) the technology products they use on a daily basis," said Campbell, vice president of

Please see **NISSAN 4A** ▶



Final phase of troop reduction starts in tsunami-ravaged region

By Ayi Jufridar
ASSOCIATED PRESS

LHOKSEUMAWE, Indonesia — Indonesia started the final phase of a troop reduction in tsunami-ravaged Aceh province today, a key step in a peace agreement with separatist rebels that was propelled forward by the disaster one year ago.

Some 3,800 soldiers carrying automatic rifles and heavy bags boarded five Navy ships and a Hercules air carrier in the port town of Lhokseumawe, just days after Free Aceh Movement rebels handed over their weapons and disbanded their military wing.

The rebels also gave up their demand for independence, effectively ending the separatist insurgency that has killed 15,000 people since 1976.

Under the peace agreement, Indonesia is pulling out about 24,000 security forces and leaving behind roughly an equal number.

The soldiers' departure today marks the final wave of the pullout, said Lt. Col. Eri Soetiko, a military spokesman.

Efforts to end the 29-year civil war moved forward after the massive earthquake struck off the coast of Aceh on Dec. 26, 2004, causing a tsunami that left at least 156,000 of the province's people



Photo • Associated Press

Indonesian Army soldiers board a navy ship today upon their withdrawal at Krueng Geukuh port in Lhokseumawe, Aceh province, Indonesia.

dead or missing and a half million homeless.

The rebels and the military each said they did not want to add to the people's suffering and hammered out an agreement during negotiations in Finland in which both sides made major concessions.

Free Aceh Movement representative Irwandi

Yusuf and Pieter Feith, head of the 240-strong European Union peace monitoring mission, were among the hundreds of people who gathered at the port today to send off the troops.

Yusuf said he hoped their departure signaled a permanent end to the fighting that has gripped the province of 4 million people on the northern tip of Sumatra island. He said his former insurgents were looking forward to taking part in local elections next year. There are an estimated 3,000 rebels in the group.

As part of the peace deal, the government vowed to withdraw more than half of its nearly 50,000 garrison from Aceh and to give the region limited self-government and control over much of the oil- and gas-rich province's mineral wealth.

The accord was reached with the help of international peace monitors, who said today the former rebels could now focus on politics instead of war.

Former fighters have come down from Aceh's forested hills in recent months and several rebel leaders have returned to their homeland after more than 25 years of self-exile. Several, however, have refused to come back because they are wary the peace deal, like a 2003 accord, would collapse and they would be arrested or killed.

More people sign up for jobless benefits

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The number of new people signing up for unemployment benefits rose last week, but even with the pickup the level of applications still pointed to an improving job climate.

The Labor Department reported today that new applications filed for unemployment insurance increased by a seasonally adjusted 3,000 to 322,000 for the week ending Dec. 24. That matched economists' expectations.

In the prior week, new filings for jobless benefits dropped by 12,000.

The latest snapshot of layoff activity confirms that the labor market is back on its feet after being knocked around by the Gulf Coast hurricanes. In the middle of September, new applications for jobless benefits surged above the 400,000 mark. Since then, they slowly have drifted downward.

Today's report also showed that the more stable four-week moving average of overall jobless claims, which smooths out weekly fluctuations, rose by just 250 to 325,000 last week. A year ago, this figure stood at 330,750.

▶ PODCAST from 1A

Piasecki, a 1990 graduate of Mona Shores High School and 1995 graduate of Central Michigan University, with degrees in marketing and graphic design.

Despite his inexperience, the local podcast has a professionally produced feel that includes a voiceover music introduction and rich sound quality. Piasecki said he spent a "couple hundred dollars" on the digital audio equipment and software to produce the podcast.

The first three shows featured interviews with Muskegon Area Chamber of Commerce President Cindy Larsen, Muskegon Area First President Jim Edmonson and Muskegon Main Street Manager Dan Rinsema-Sybenga. The podcasts have included Piasecki's commentaries and comments from listeners read by the host.

Piasecki is an unabashed Muskegon booster.

"I'm an advocate for Muskegon, but I will not be editorializing," Piasecki said. "I will share the feedback from listeners, sharing the negative comments as well."

But he doesn't want it to become a place where people air just "negative and unproductive" thoughts, either.

"Muskegon is not Utopia, but also, it's not the end of the world," Piasecki said.

He produces and makes available a new "Inside Muskegon" podcast every Monday. Anyone with a computer that has a broadband Internet connection and basic software, such as Microsoft's Windows Media Player or Real Player, can listen to the program — or any other podcast on the Internet.

Piasecki is not sure how or if "Inside Muskegon" will become part of his business, which provides Internet, print and multimedia CD marketing products and services to small businesses.

After college, Piasecki began Imagequest in the Detroit area and offered his services to automotive parts suppliers, an industry he worked in briefly as a marketing specialist.

But marriage and twin daughters brought Piasecki home. His wife, Tracey, was a marketing manager for the Motor City Casino in Detroit, but after the twins arrived, the couple moved to Muskegon in 2003 and she began assisting with Imagequest as mar-

keting director.

In Muskegon, Imagequest continues to serve its Detroit-area clients but also has begun to work for local businesses such as Norton Pines Athletic Club, the Muskegon Country Club and the Sardine Room.

Piasecki, ImageQuest and "Inside Muskegon" all are part of the new "creative economy" budding in Muskegon, said the chamber's Larsen.

Podcasting "is another new communications medium which is about to explode," Larsen said. "I am proud to know that Muskegon entrepreneurs like Jason are on top of it. Learning to promote Muskegon globally is a unique challenge."

Piasecki and Imagequest were early users of the Internet, launching a Web page in 1997. At the beginning of 2005, Piasecki began his own Internet "blog," a personal journal he uses to help small business clients with marketing issues.

"Podcasts show the convergence of the media," Piasecki said. "Traditional radio is over the air. But this ties together radio and the Web. It provides interesting content on demand. You can have it at home, in your car or while working out."

Listeners can find all the "Inside Muskegon" shows at www.insidemuskegon.com or they can access them through "podcatching" sites, such as iTunes.com, odeo.com and podnova.com. These "syndication networks" allow users to register and have selected podcasts collected and even downloaded — as MP3 files — to their computers or portable media players.

Right now for users, everything is free.

"When I was able to get 'Inside Muskegon' onto iTunes, I felt that I had arrived," Piasecki said. "Odeo, iTunes and Podnova will become the networks of the future just like ABC, NBC and CBS."

Piasecki said there is no income coming from "Inside Muskegon," nor does he ever expect to make money from the effort.

However, embedding advertising into podcasts is just around the corner. Already, Home Depot is sponsoring a podcast on home-improvement topics and Best Buy a podcast on the latest in consumer electronics.

▶ VODCAST from 1A

videoblogs and vlogs, the video downloads automatically while you're checking your e-mail, buying holiday gifts or even cooking dinner just as long as your PC is online. To view free video, you "subscribe" to a show from the podcast directory in iTunes, much as you "subscribe" to an audio podcast.

After subscribing, the latest episode is automatically downloaded to your computer every time it is released — much in the way a digital video recorder will record a TV show automatically. If you own a video iPod, the video will be transferred to the iPod when you synchronize your iPod with iTunes.

Video podcasts existed before the video iPod, but the device seems to have ignited interest.

Just consider some of the recent announcements about free video podcasts. "American Experience," the popular history series on PBS, is offering clips from its broadcasts via iTunes. IPlayMusic, a provider of interactive music products, is making a series of 35 guitar video lessons available. And more companies can be expected to trot out offerings as video podcasting gains in popularity.

Even better, the video iPod — in combination with the video podcasting technology in iTunes — likely will trigger plenty of grass-roots efforts to provide homegrown video of all sorts. Mini-dramas, comedy routines, mock news shows — all can be expected to appear in coming months, if they haven't already. Don't be surprised if you hear about a commentator or comedian being "discovered" from a video podcast.

Consider Rocketboom, a popular daily "videoblog" with an eclectic range of stories. Produced by a pair in New York City with relatively cheap tools — essentially a video camera, a notebook computer and lights — the show has gained an international following for its blend of humor and news. One commentator on TV and technology (TVPredictions.com), referring to the host of Rocketboom, recently wrote a piece with the headline "Could This Woman Drive Broadband Television?"

No one really knows what the video iPod will mean for TV and broadcasting, but it's becoming clear the rules are changing with a nudge from Apple, just as they have for online music.

▶ PETITION from 1A

hearing could help detect potential weaknesses in Michigan's ballot proposal system. Another group that opposes the ballot measure, One United Michigan, says it appears the misrepresentation laws covering a recall petition for a township official are tougher than those for a proposed constitutional amendment.

"If somebody is deceived into signing a petition, that's not right," Granholm said. "And if in fact there is no law about that, perhaps (the hearing) will provide the ground, the data, the evidence to create such a law if in fact there is none."

Opponents' objections deal with arguments over what petition circulators told voters when collecting signatures. There's basically no paper trail, something that makes the case unique, state election officials say.

BAMN and other opponents say some circulators told voters that the measure would support affirmative action or civil rights, something they argue it doesn't do.

MCRI supporters say the measure would indeed protect civil rights — but they mean the civil rights of people such as Gratz, a white female who contends she was passed over for admission to the University of Michigan in favor of a less-qualified minority student. Gratz ended up attending classes at the university's Dearborn campus.

The attorney general's office has passed on investigating the claims, arguing it's hard to make a determination of wrongdoing when it comes down to people's different interpretation of what was said.

Republican Attorney General Mike Cox points out that the law requires that voters get a chance to read the petition language before they sign it. He says people who signed the petition likely understood its contents.

"Obviously bad faith representations are wrong," Cox says. "But when the Legislature designed the statute the way it did, I assume they said we will forever have fights about what people said orally, and the best evidence is what's on the petition itself."

BAMN is dissatisfied with the state's ballot review process, which involved checking a random sample of 500 signatures. BAMN challenged 325 of them and needed to per-



Photo • Associated Press

Protesters who attended a Board of State Canvassers meeting Dec. 14 leave en masse from the Lansing Center in Lansing.

Upcoming dates

Key dates related to a November 2006 ballot proposal that would ban the use of race and gender preferences in university admissions and government hiring:

■ **Friday:** Suggestions from the public are due to the state elections director for consideration in crafting the proposal's wording on the ballot. Suggestions received by Tuesday will be reviewed and could be considered later in the process.

■ **Jan. 6:** Court-ordered deadline for state elections director to submit proposed ballot wording.

suade state officials to reject about 200 to derail the proposal.

State elections officials tossed out only 50 signatures, including 42 that BAMN had challenged, for being defective or because the signer wasn't registered to vote.

The rest of BAMN's challenges were rejected primarily because they weren't substantiated. Elections officials say many were based on implications, such as the concept that if a petition circulator deceived one signer, the other voters who signed that particular petition must have been deceived as well and would want their signatures withdrawn.

BAMN submitted few voter-signed affidavits to back its challenge, instead relying heavily on examples from follow-up phone conversations with selected voters. Gratz's

On the 'Net

Here's where to find more information:

- **Michigan Civil Rights Initiative:** www.michigancivilrights.org
- **The Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action, Integration & Immigrant Rights and Fight for Equality by Any Means Necessary (BAMN):** www.bamn.com
- **One United Michigan:** www.oneunitedmichigan.org
- **Michigan Department of State:** www.michigan.gov/sos
- **Michigan Attorney General's Office:** www.michigan.gov/ag

■ **Jan. 11:** Public hearing before the Michigan Civil Rights Commission into allegations that some voters were misled on what the proposal would do by those gathering signatures to put it on the ballot.

■ **Jan. 20:** Court-ordered deadline for Board of State Canvassers to approve ballot wording.

group says BAMN misrepresented some of those situations.

But BAMN points to the case of Wayne County Circuit Court Judge Robert Ziolkowski, who signed the petition outside a Detroit store but returned to scratch off his name once he heard a description of the proposal's intent. He said the petition circulator misled him into thinking it would support affirmative action, but Ziolkowski also acknowledged he did not carefully read the petition before signing.

Voters have a responsibility to know what they are signing when asked to support putting a measure on the ballot, secretary of state spokeswoman Kelly Chesney said.

"Voters need to read the petitions," Chesney said. "Don't sign anything unless you know what it says."

▶ NISSAN from 1A

design at Nissan's advanced research and design center in San Diego.

Installing the latest entertainment gadget on wheels is a staple in the auto business. Car radios date to the 1920s. The 1950s Chrysler offered a phonograph under the dashboard. Today, DVD players and MP3 digital music player hookups are found in many vehicles.

The lightweight aluminum and carbon-fiber Urge was designed in San Diego and hand-built by Metal Crafters Inc. in Fountain Valley, Calif.

The sleek design was inspired by a racing motorcycle and features a see-through glass hood; narrow, oversize tires and wheels; and bulging, motorcycle-style fenders, Campbell said. The car has an open "T" roof reminiscent of the Pontiac Trans Am and Chevrolet Camaro of the 1970s, plus a folding canvas cover for rainy days.

Although Nissan does not plan to market anything that looks like the Urge, some of its features could be used on a future youth-oriented sports car, said Nissan spokesman Fred Standish.

▶ BRIDGE from 1A

sale in 2004.

The road commission sold the bonds because state funds for bridge maintenance and repair are hard to come by, and the county's rural bridges needed work, said Hulka.

The County Line Bridge project is expected to cost about \$1.1 million. The rest of the money was spent on reconstruction of a bridge on Maple Island Road, painting on three or four bridges and minor repair work on several others, Hulka said.

"The only way I could ever be satisfied (with bridge condi-

The County Line Bridge project is the largest piece of a \$2 million road commission bridge upgrade project, which was funded with a special bond sale in 2004.

tions) is if we had 56 new ones," Hulka said. "But this goes a long way toward upgrading the average condition of the entire bridge system."



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