

# Mother accepts her girl's death, wants body found

By Carol Robinson  
News staff writer

The blaring television that had been left on all night roared in Nelda Corley Leopard's ears.

It was that grating noise that comes when a channel goes off the air and the screen turns snowy. And it's what the single mother of five daughters remembers most about the pre-dawn hours of Aug. 12, 1980,

when she woke up to find her apartment in shambles and her youngest girl gone.

"The static was so loud I couldn't hear nothing but the TV," Ms. Leopard said. "It was like a nightmare. I won't never forget it."

It's been nearly two decades since 14-year-old Carla Rebeca Corley vanished from the public housing community on Airport Highway where she lived with her mother.

Ms. Leopard has long since accepted that Carla probably is dead. What she wants now is for those who know where the body is to come forward so the young girl can be properly laid to rest.

"We would all bury her like God would want her buried — as a loving family," Ms. Leopard said. "We miss her and love her and it hurts."

Carla's disappearance is one of the Birmingham Police Department's See **Missing**, Page 17A



Carla Rebeca Corley  
Her 1980 disappearance has never been solved.

# Tobacco tax bill facing state House

## Vote set on Children First

By David White  
News staff writer

MONTGOMERY — State lawmakers will wrestle this week over what would be the second-biggest tax increase in Alabama this decade — the Children First plan to raise as much as \$160 million a year from tobacco products.

Votes expected on Children First in the state House of Representatives likely will be close, and debate could rage long into the night Tuesday and even into Thursday.

"I would be hesitant to predict, but I think it has a reasonable chance to go through, but I couldn't guarantee that," said Speaker Jimmy Clark, D-Eufaula, the top-ranking House member.

The tax-and-assessment plan would dwarf the 5-cents-per-gallon tax on gasoline that lawmakers passed in 1992, which raises \$113 million a year for highways and bridges. It would be rivaled only by the \$172 million a year in taxes that lawmakers in 1992 put on hospitals, nursing homes and pharmacies to

raise money for Medicaid. Supporters say the Children First money is urgently needed for health insurance for poor teenagers, more day care, extra beds at detention centers for young criminals, alternative schools for disruptive students and more juvenile probation officers.

Money for children's programs would be guaranteed for next year only. After that, lawmakers could spend the money on other things, though supporters believe the children's programs would prove to be invaluable and keep getting the money.

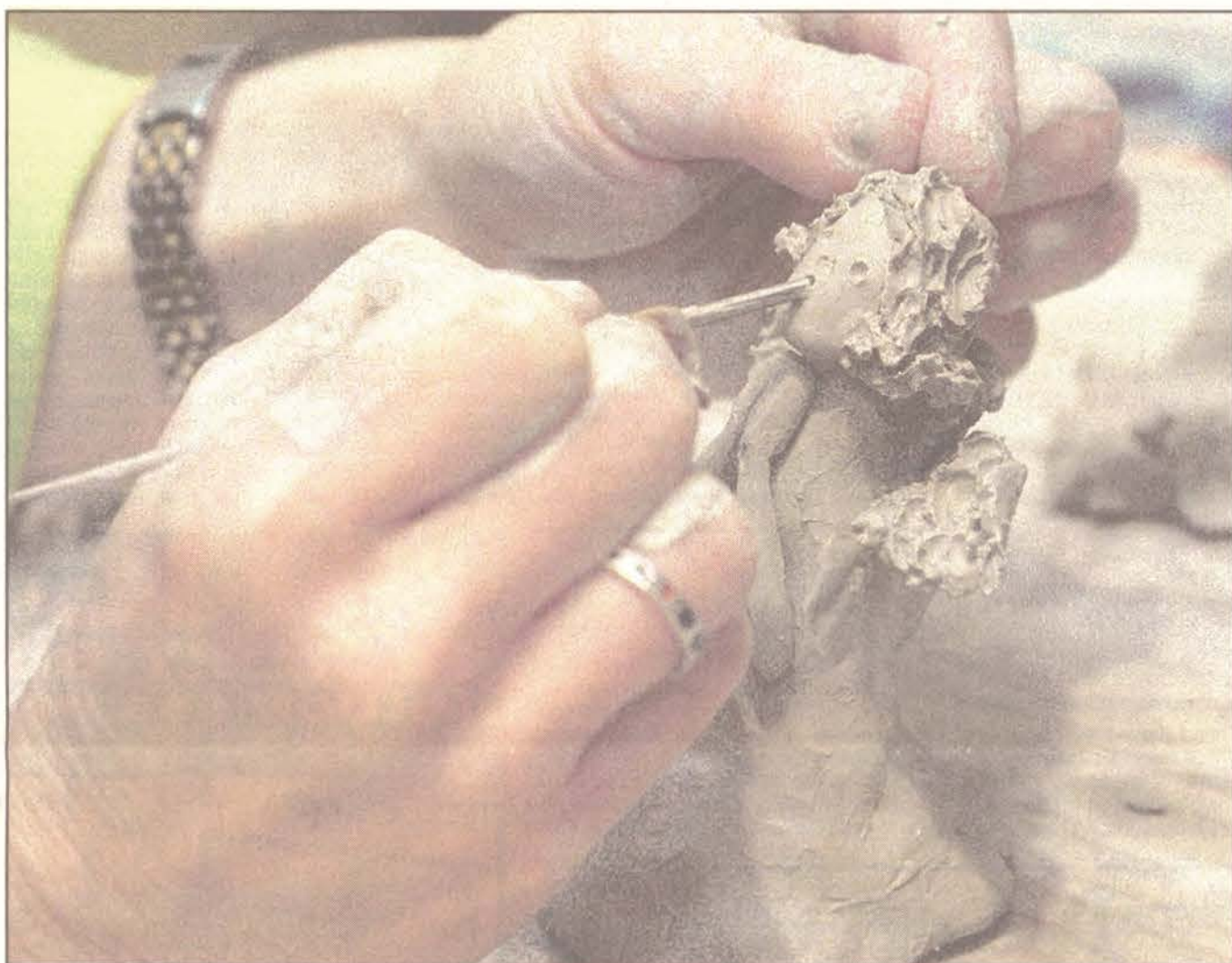
"As an FBI agent who worked drugs in Washington, D.C., I quickly learned that all the guns and all the badges in the world were not going to solve that problem of juvenile crime, juvenile drug dealing," said state Rep. Howard Hawk, D-Arab, the lead sponsor of Children First.

He said it is important "to get to children as soon as possible if we didn't want to lose them. That means giving children hope, giving

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# Little angels of inspiration

A delicate touch creates a figure's mouth.



NEWS STAFF PHOTOS/BERNARD TRONCALI

# Grief uncovers woman's artistic gift

By Kathy Kemp  
News staff writer

Like a doctor trying to jump-start a heart, Susanne Lambert massages the lump of clay and searches for a sign of life.

"Come on," she whispers, gently pulling and patting the fist-sized gray mass.

As miracles go, this one is quiet and small, yet thrilling to a woman still grieving over a long-dead baby. Mrs. Lambert's face seems radiant as the clay takes the shape of a praying child, with curly hair and angel's wings. God, it seems, is with her after all.

"The clay is like a person," she says, holding the figurine to the light of a window in her Springville home. "You have to be careful with it, take time with it. And be tender."

That is one of many lessons Mrs. Lambert has learned in the years since she entered East End Hospital on a March day in 1978. She expected to give birth to a baby

named Eli. Instead, she returned home with empty arms and a heart that ached for her stillborn son, fatally choked by his umbilical cord.

Even today, when Mrs. Lambert talks about her loss, she cries.

"I'm sorry," she says through the tears. "It still hurts."

## Talent emerges

Out of her pain, another kind of life emerged. With no art training beyond grade-school drawings of ballerinas, the 50-year-old Birmingham native has turned into an artist. Her paintings and sculptures of angelic children don't last long in Birmingham-area gift shops, including Ruby Begonia and Ruby's in Homewood, Cherish the Thought in Trussville and the Quilted Cat in Mountain Brook.

Attached to each artwork is an inspirational saying or Bible verse designed as balm for a stranger's pain.

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Springville resident Susanne Springfield has found a niche turning clay into angels.

# Mobile 7th-grader spells way to title

By Jerry Underwood  
News staff writer

Mobile's Stephen Richardson wasn't sure what the word "pandiculation" means, but the seventh-grader from Baker High School knew how to spell it.

That meant Richardson beat Rob Keith, an eighth-grader from First Assembly Christian School in Clay County, in a tense showdown to win the Alabama Spelling Bee on Saturday.

Richardson got his chance when Keith missed "neuralgia" at the end of the three-hour contest. Richardson correctly spelled that word and then "pandiculation" — a word that means a stretching of the trunk and extremities when fatigued or waking.

"It was very nerve-wracking," Richardson said when it was over.

The winner will represent Alabama in the Scripps Howard National Spelling Bee from May 24-30 in Washington, D.C. Saturday's bee was sponsored by the *Birmingham Post-Herald*, a Scripps Howard newspaper.

Sixty-seven students from the third to the eighth grades partici-



NEWS STAFF PHOTO/FRANK COUGH

Stephen Richardson correctly spelled 'pandiculation' to win the state's spelling bee Saturday.

pated in the contest, held at the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex. The top five finishers received prizes such as savings bonds, dictionaries and a camera.

Adam Schimelfenig, a seventh-grader at Charles Henderson Middle School in Pike County, finished third. Tara Anderson, an eighth-grader at Jackson Academy in Clarke County, was fourth, while Margaret Maloney, an eighth-grader at Morgan County's St. Ann Catholic School, was fifth.

Richardson said he prepared for

See **Spelling bee**, Page 17A

# Big plans ringing in area codes

By Jerry Underwood  
News staff writer

Alabama's great telephone-number crunch has a funny ring.

Regulators say they were forced to carve out a new area code for north and east Alabama, citing an explosive demand for telephone numbers. The 256 code takes effect Monday.

Behind the figures, however, lurks an inescapable fact: Most of the more than 1.1 million new numbers set aside last year for companies wanting to offer local phone service in Alabama aren't being used.

By comparison, BellSouth Corp.

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# Police decoys hit street to combat prostitution

By Chanda Temple  
News staff writer

Men were quick to let Mary Wiley know they were willing to pay for a good time Friday night. A minute after stepping onto an East Lake street corner, a man offered to trade her a crack rock for sex.

He got more than he bargained for.

Wiley is a Birmingham police officer, part of citywide sting operations that made 18 arrests in a five-hour crackdown on prostitution Friday night.

"I call it 'the candy store,'" Sgt. James Wiggins said. "We put the girls out there. They're sweet. And we wait for the bad little boys to come by."

The candy store was busy. Within 20 minutes of setting up

shop on that East Lake street corner, police charged six men with solicitation or indecent proposal.

"This is a busy little place," Wiley, a narcotics officer, said before trading places with another woman officer.

Police say they've been conducting prostitution stings for years, and Friday's stings in East Lake, downtown and Enley are part of their "zero tolerance" approach to crime-fighting.

Wiggins said police stings won't end the world's oldest profession. But he said it's worth it if it spares only one person from being killed, robbed or exposed to a disease.

"I think we're doing a service for the community," Wiley said. "They (police) get See **Prostitution**, Page 16A



NEWS STAFF PHOTO/HAL YEAGER

A Birmingham officer puts an arrested man into a paddywagon during Friday night's sting operation.