

*'To injure no man,
but to bless all mankind'*

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Travel Who says a 'tour de France' has to be about bicycles? Concoct your own tour, concentrating on art. **Page 11**

Living Overeating isn't the only cause of childhood obesity. Cultural and social changes may play a role, too. **Page 14**
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SILENT LOOMS

PATRIK JONSSON



JOBLESS: Venita Allman worked at Pillowtex for years.

A beleaguered mill town struggles toward reinvention

By PATRIK JONSSON
CORRESPONDENT

KANNAPOLIS, N.C. — During a lifetime among the looms, Venita Allman did it all, working her way from the weave room to the spinning room to the bleaching in these cavernous textile mills.

Now she's selling baby clothes and toys from her daughter's beat-up Mercury, and living in the shadow of a shuttered mill — part of a generation left behind by the faded promise of a worker's utopia.

"It just makes it tough, the way it is," Ms. Allman says, managing a smile. "All I've got left to sell is this broken jewelry on my fingers, and it ain't worth much."

Workers who grew up here in Kannapolis, where the mill owner provided everything from light bulbs to Bibles, have crashed headfirst into the realities of 21st-century commerce. When the Pillowtex Mill gave some 7,000 workers — 4,800 of them in North Carolina — two hours to get out in the summer of 2003, it became the biggest mass layoff in state history. And as workers disassembled antique looms and shipped them to Pakistan, it also became a rallying cry for critics of global outsourcing. Suddenly, this mill town was in the maelstrom of economic and social flux.

In the months since, Kannapolis has found itself adrift, torn between its crumbling identity as a mill town and the slow hints of recovery

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Marines prep for a shifting enemy

■ Senior US and Iraqi officials say a US-led invasion of the rebel stronghold, 30 miles west of Baghdad, could begin within days.

By SCOTT PETERSON
STAFF WRITER

NEAR FALLUJAH, IRAQ — Breathing hard and leading with their rifles, a cluster of US marines takes cover behind a mountain of rubble. Another team dashes across a field, concealing themselves behind a large metal wheel.

"Rat-a-tat-tat!" shouts one, like a comic-book warrior. "You're dead!" declares another, at pretend insurgents.

If training is key to battlefield success, the marines of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force are trying to maximize their skills as they prepare for the type of urban offensive

most military experts anticipated 18 months ago, when US forces first entered Baghdad.

Senior US and Iraqi officials say an invasion of the city could begin within days, in a bid to decapitate the insurgency that has spread across Iraq. The challenge for these troops will be to stay one step ahead of a resistance that is constantly evolving, has become adept at using the Internet to share tactics, is fighting on its home turf, and has

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MARK SEROTA/REUTERS

★ FOR ELECTION
★ RESULTS ★
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Getting out to vote

Florida voters stood in line to cast ballots yesterday, on an Election Day that drew strong turnout right from the start, with long lines and close scrutiny. As this issue went to press, polls remained open.

For reliable voting results, look abroad

By PETER FORD
STAFF WRITER

PARIS — In the eyes of the rest of the world, American democracy is a wonderful thing: The wonder is how it can work.

As US voters used punch cards, levers, touch screens, and paper ballots to elect their new president yesterday — while lawyers stood by to challenge the results — voters in younger democracies marveled at the anachronistic complexity of the US system, and took pride in their modernity.

Since 1950, 95 nations have adopted this form of government. As the professed beacon and chief promoter of democratic rights around the

world, the US has funded programs and sent electoral observers to pass judgment on the fairness of the process.

But since the contested election of 2000, the US system is seen by these new democracies — and older ones — as less credible.

Whether they use ticks on ballot papers, buttons on touch-pads, or hand-held bar code readers, foreign voters enjoy one advantage over their US counterparts: Within each country, voters cast their ballots using just one method, and those ballots are counted uniformly.

"If you don't have uniformity and harmonized

See **ELECTION** page 7

Why job market stays tough

■ Economy grows, but oil prices, war, and debt weigh heavily. A test for CEOs, next president.

By RON SCHERER
STAFF WRITER

NEW YORK — Businessman Edward Foy Jr. has made so many changes to his budget for next year it's beginning to look like one of those complicated plays from a sandlot football game.

Add a new executive vice president for the company, eFashion Solutions. No, wait on that. How about a new warehouse automation system? No, maybe it's better not to spend the money and stick with the workers who know where everything is.

This zigging and zagging reflects Mr. Foy's uncertainty about the economy, something that is shared by many business executives. For the next US president, a key challenge will be to convince these executives that it's safe to add to the payroll and grow the company.

It will be an uphill task, given that economists anticipate the business climate will be losing steam: Oil prices are expected to take a larger bite out of corporate profits, and the Federal Reserve may still be raising interest rates, which may contribute to a slower pace for housing construction.

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