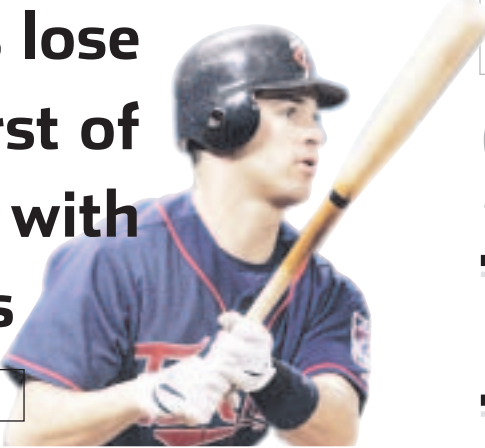


Twins lose first of three with Tigers



Sports, 1D

Hoping the Wild spend big on free agents? Think again, 1D

St. Paul PIONEER PRESS

88 high, 68 low > See Page 6D

twincities.com

TUESDAY 7-1-2008

THE WAR OVER affordable housing

Builders say regulations, and lots of them, keep suburban home prices unreasonably high. And, they suspect, sometimes officials like it that way.



PIONEER PRESS PHOTOS: JEAN PIERI

Carpenter Peter Orbidan works on a D.R. Horton home going up in Lakeville. Despite many cost-saving measures, the home is priced at \$240,000. Builders say fewer regulations could wipe \$40,000 from the price of such a home, putting it in the affordable category.

Over-ruled?

By Bob Shaw
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Stephen Paul wants to build you an affordable home. But to do that, he'd have to break the law. His \$240,000 D.R. Horton home in Lakeville is a masterpiece of cost cutting — one of the least expensive new three-bedroom homes in the area. Yet the price isn't close to the \$200,000 that is deemed affordable for typical Twin Cities incomes.

The reason is regulations — affordability's worst enemy. Paul and every other homebuilder could be selling new houses and town homes for at least 20 percent less — if regulations permitted it — experts say.

"We break out into a sweat. We get so mad thinking about them all," said Casey Cermak, president of the Builders Association of the Twin Cities.

Today, as more Minnesotans than ever are priced out of the housing market, housing advocates are joining with homebuilders. Their common goal: Make it easier to build less expensive homes on cheaper and smaller parcels of land.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING, 4A >



Stephen Paul, vice president for homebuilder D.R. Horton sales and marketing in Minnesota, cites regulations that raise prices for new suburban homes and limit a buyer's ability to make money-saving choices on items such as architectural extras.

What drives costs up?

Builders and officials say overzealous regulating makes affordable suburban housing difficult to create. Frequently cited regulations require:

- Minimum lot sizes.
- Limits on rental units, bans on room rentals and remodeling restrictions.
- Retaining ponds to eliminate runoff.
- Street parking bans.
- Landscaping.

The biggest Olympic coin ever is 22 pounds of solid gold and available from a Burnsville dealer for a mere \$1 million

If only the medals were this big

By Nicole Garrison-Sprenger
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It could double as a shot put, but it's worth a little too much to chuck in the dirt.

A 22-pound gold coin commemorating the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing is waiting in Burnsville for someone to plunk down \$1 million for a piece of history.

Now, if you're a big fan of the Olympics, you could fly to Beijing, stay for a week, watch the Games live and buy a T-shirt for considerably less.

But a million dollars for a coin that isn't even old?

It turns out, a solid-gold coin that weighs as much as a 1-year-old child doesn't come along every day.

The coin released by the China Mint is the biggest Olympic coin made to date, said Douglas Mudd, a curator at the American Numismatic Association money museum.

"Twenty-two pounds — that's a lot of gold," he said.

OLYMPIC COIN, 4A >



By the numbers

- Size: 7 inches in diameter
- Weight: 22 pounds, not including presentation box
- Number made: 29
- Available in the U.S.: 1
- Issued by: China Mint

From lovebird to jailbird — thanks to an escape ruse

Girlfriend behind bars on charges of arranging Minneapolis breakout

By David Hanners
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A Minneapolis woman who allegedly used her dying mother in a scheme to spring her boyfriend from jail was charged Monday with helping the man escape custody.

After a 10-day manhunt, Martese Carl Cobbs was found in a hidden room built into the attic of Courtne Lashell White's home. While Cobbs faces a single charge of escape, White faces three felony charges: aiding an escape, aiding an offender and being an accomplice after the fact.

White, who turns 24 on Wednesday, was ordered held on \$25,000 bail after authorities formally accused her of helping Cobbs escape from the Hennepin County Adult Detention Center on June 2.

Jailed on a robbery charge, Cobbs was granted an eight-hour furlough on the pretense of visiting his dying mother in a hospice; he never returned. Authorities now say his mother was fine and that White hoodwinked a hospice worker, a public defender and a judge.

In reality, it was White's mother who was

GIRLFRIEND CHARGED, 6A >

Charter school review calls for oversight modifications

Financial health improves; differences in student test scores played down

By Doug Belden
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Traditional public schools in Minnesota outperformed charters on state tests in 2007, but the differences were minor when such factors as income and student mobility were included, according to a report released Monday by the state legislative auditor's office.

The report examined not just test scores but oversight of Minnesota's charter schools — a fast-growing sector of the state's educational landscape that numbered 143 schools last year and received more than \$220 million in state aid in fiscal year 2007.

Generally, the report found both overlaps and gaps in how charters, which are tuition-free public schools but operate independently of traditional districts, are approved and managed.

CHARTER SCHOOL REVIEW, 4A >

Online

Read the auditor's report at www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us.

Find test scores, demographic data and other information on Minnesota charter and public schools at twincities.com/dataplanet.



Check it out @twincities.com

Learn which state firms should benefit from an anti-obesity push. blogs.twincities.com/medical_hotdish

Encore: Watch Saturday's demolition of the Xcel Energy High Bridge coal plant smokestack.