

Hits and Misses: May 24, 2011

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HITS

ATTACK ARREST There's finally some good news in the sad story of Bryan Stow. Early Sunday, Los Angeles police arrested a Southern California man who investigators say was the "primary aggressor" in the brutal, unprovoked attack of the 42-year-old Live Oak paramedic outside Dodger Stadium on baseball's Opening Day. For nearly two months, Stow, a fervent Giants fan and father of two, has remained in a coma in critical condition while his attackers walked free. L.A. authorities, however, kept at the case, and a massive public relations blitz and hefty reward apparently paid dividends. The suspect's parole agent noticed the man's resemblance to a sketch of the attacker, and that he had some new tattoos covering some highly visible ones. It was good police work -- leading to some much-needed good news.

TRAILBLAZERS U.S. veterans returning home from their stints abroad face some gloomy job prospects. The unemployment rate nationally and locally remains high, and hundreds of thousands of people are still out of work. Amid that reality, though, comes word of a new state program that aims to help veterans, and others, seeking work. California's Backcountry Trails Program, backed by state Secretary of Natural Resources John Laird, a Santa Cruz resident, as well as State Parks Director Ruth Coleman, comprises crews that repair washed-out back country trails and make new ones -- including a crew making repairs in Wilder Ranch State Park last week. So while state parks face deep cuts in these hard economic times, positive programs remain.

MISSES

END OF THE COVERAGE By now you are surely as fed up as we are with the flood of snarky stories on the much-ridiculed, yet much-covered prediction of the world's apocalyptic end this past weekend. The prophecy of an 89-year-old Christian radio entrepreneur garnered front-page coverage in newspapers worldwide, not to mention constant Internet, TV and radio mentions. This was the most important news out there? Harold Camping was easy to tee up. He's the leader of a fringe group, and his prophecies are not taken seriously by 99.9 percent of the world including the vast majority of Christians. Give his prediction a small mention, but focusing such over-the-top attention on this obviously loony prediction makes the media look far worse than Camping.

NUMBERS GAME The latest unemployment numbers are in and the news seems encouraging. Or is it? The regional jobless rate fell to 13.1 percent in April, a sharp drop from 14.7 in March. But amid the positive quotes from analysts are the explanations that there's historically always a drop in the jobless rate from March to April. The county, meanwhile, is lagging behind the state, which reported a jobless rate of 11.9 percent. While that is the fourth straight monthly decline, it comes amid tepid and uneven job growth that lags the rest of the nation. One analyst noted that a drop below 12 percent is actually "not that meaningful and continues to reflect a labor force that has shrunk." Plus, the most

robust job growth is in sectors that demand highly specialized skills. So nationally millions remain jobless with few immediate prospects. Bad news masquerading as good.