



HIGH **35°** LOW **25°**

Some rain, some sleet, no sunshine. Details/B2

**BUSINESS** Capital Region stocks lag during a tough 2005 market/ **C1**



**SPORTS** Wins bring Giants, Coughlin closer/ **D1**

**LIFE•TODAY** You'll want to read what Americans say they need/ **G1**

**B1** ► The life and times of Albany's Nebraska Brace.

**B1** ► Local Muslims join millions in Mecca.

# TIMES UNION

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ALBANY, NEW YORK ■ SUNDAY, JANUARY 8, 2006

## Infant killed in Troy inferno

Flames drive back neighbors trying to rescue trapped infant

By **TIM O'BRIEN**  
Staff writer

TROY — An 8-month-old baby girl died inside a burning Troy home Saturday, as neighbors tried to get past the flames to save the child.

Neighbors Eihab and Moamen Awad tried to get into the first floor apartment at 20 Park Ave. but could not get past the flames.

"I tried to get in, but halfway through, the fire kicked me out," Eihab Awad said. The fire continued to smolder late Saturday night, and authorities said they were not yet sure what caused the blaze.

The houses at 18 and 20 Park Ave. were declared a total loss, and Mayor Harry Tutunjian said they would be demolished after the fire investigation was complete. A home at 16 Park Ave. also suffered some damage.

## Schools prepare new tests

Teachers set strategies to help third-graders with U.S.-mandated exams

By **RICK KARLIN**  
Staff writer

Imagine third-graders trying to answer SAT questions.

Something like that will happen this week as New York, in keeping with the federal No Child Left Behind act, tests nearly a quarter-million third-graders in reading, writing and listening.

Because this is the first time kids as young as 8 years old will take these tests, teachers across the state have been coaching their students on test-taking strategies as well as English skills.

And third-graders are not the only ones being tested.

Thanks to the NCLB act, all students between grades 3 and 8 will be tested in English and math this year. In previous years, only fourth- and eighth-grade students were tested in New York.

All told, the number of kids being tested will rise from about 600,000 to 1.75 million this year.

Many of these youngsters have taken internal tests schools use to keep track of student progress. This year's test results will be publicized and, inevitably, compared.

Please see **TESTS A13** ►



**SHERRY STANLEY** worships at Northway Fellowship, a former gym in a Malta plaza.

Nontraditional churches are growing quickly as worshippers seek services they feel are more in touch with their lives.



PHOTOS BY **PAUL BUCKOWSKI/TIMES UNION**

**WORSHIPPERS** listen to a Sunday sermon recently at Pastor Buddy's Northway Fellowship church in Malta.

# Reconciling religion and relevance

BY **MARC PARRY**  
STAFF WRITER

**P**astor Buddy doesn't put himself on a pedestal; that's one thing Meaghan McDermott loves about him. He did put himself on a Harley-Davidson once, though. Right on stage.

The crowd has no idea what he'll do tonight as the clock hits 5:59 p.m., the lights flick off, and the amps pump out a disco beat.

Flat-screen TVs tick down the final minute. Cameras pan. The wall-length mirror reflects 300 spectators buzzing like a TV studio audience.

They're here on Saturday night, at this former gym in a Malta shopping plaza, for church. A different kind of church. Pastor Buddy's church.

"Nothing is off-limits," says McDermott, 27, a former Catholic who drives nearly 40 minutes from Rotterdam to hear Pastor Buddy preach at Saratoga County's Northway Fellowship. "He talks about sexuality, infidelity, problems with marriages."

Around the Capital Region, an expanding group of nondenominational churches like Pastor Buddy's is grabbing more and more worshippers like McDermott. These relatively new, independent, nontraditional



**KEVIN BRUSTLE** of Stillwater performs with the rest of the Northway Worship Team. The band plays a large part in the church's worship services.

congregations vary in size and theology. But generally, as one pastor put it, they present Christianity stripped of many man-made traditions.

That means no robes, pews, steeples, arcane language, formal dress or rigidly structured services. Instead, these tech-savvy churches channel the Bible into an always-changing multimedia experience. A service can incorporate full electric bands,

prefilmed vignettes and massive screens.

"Disney shouldn't outdo the church," says Pastor Buddy, whose last name is Cremeans. "Vegas shouldn't outdo the church. The most creative, compelling entity on the planet should be the local church."

Local probably isn't the best way to describe churches like Northway. What they've become are regional congregations

Please see **CHURCH A7** ►

## DeLay cedes House post

Republican, pressured by his party in wake of Abramoff corruption case, permanently steps down as majority leader

By **DAVID ESPO**  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Rep. Tom DeLay, the defiant face of a conservative revolution in Congress, stepped down as House majority leader on Saturday under pressure from Republicans staggered by an election-year corruption scandal.



**DeLAY**

"During my time in Congress, I have always acted in an ethical manner within the rules of our body and the laws of our land," the Texas lawmaker told fellow Republicans in a letter informing them of his decision.

**A12** ► Probe looks at influential lobbying firm.

**A12** ► Gifts often surpass Congress rules.

Still, referring to criminal charges he faces in his home state, he added, "I cannot allow our adversaries to divide and distract our attention."

DeLay temporarily gave up his leadership post after he was charged, but always insisted he would reclaim his duties after clearing his name.

His turnabout cleared the way for leadership elections among Republicans buffeted by poor polls and by lobbyist Jack Abramoff's confessions of guilt on corruption charges in connection with congressional wining and dining.

The race to replace DeLay as majority leader began taking shape immediately, with Reps. Roy Blunt of Missouri, the GOP whip, and John Boehner of Ohio, a former

Please see **DeLAY A12** ►

### Focus on limits of power

► Judge Samuel A. Alito's views on presidential powers will be examined at his confirmation hearings this week./ **A5**

► New Orleans and Louisiana appear ready to clash over how to rebuild the city./ **A10**

► One of the trapped men in the Sago Mine kept a timeline of the group's last hours./ **A11**

### INSIDE

Vic Mackey can't hide behind "The Shield" as FX drama returns.

On TV



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### Stocks — and more

Check out the weekly stock market review. **Plus:** Find out who's on the move, buying property. **Business/C4-6**

