

**WEATHER**

CHANCE OF SHOWERS  
HIGH: 88-LOW: 75  
DETAILS: C-5

1237-11111

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**King of frock 'n' roll**

The man behind the Versace label

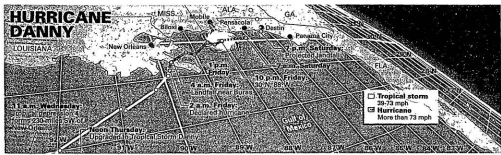
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# The Times-Picayune

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## Meandering storm slaps Buras, stalks Gulf Coast



A fisherman holds onto his hat in high winds Friday morning in Buras as he inspects damage at Jeanette's Marina. "I saw boats sinking one after another, and there was nothing I could do to help," said another fisherman, Roy Fontaine, 57, of Buras. STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN PAAG

### Grand Isle holdouts get rude wake-up

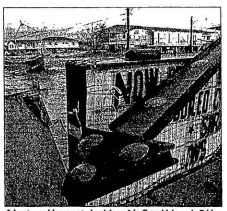
By JOANNA WEISS  
Staff writer

GRAND ISLE — They were proud of their courage the night before, but the Grand Isle residents who ignored Thursday's evacuation orders were feeling a little sheepish Friday morning.

As night fell, about a quarter of the island's denizens had laughed off the storm, which they said would be no rougher than a winter squall. Grand Isle native Paul Bradbury, 67, said he opened his door to check the weather at 1:30 a.m. The air was calm and clear, so he went to bed thinking the disturbance had passed.

He was wrong. It was the eye of a hurricane, and the work was ahead.

Danny traveled west as it crossed the island, spinning counterclockwise around its eye. The first half of the storm pushed water behind Grand Isle, into Bayou Rigou. But after the eye passed the winds shifted and pushed the water back onto the island.



A boat was blown onto Louisiana 1 in Grand Isle early Friday near Camardelle's Seafood and Bait Shop, which was flooded by the storm surge.

The result was a tidal surge that slammed boats into their piers, and floodwater that reached several feet at its highest points.

And many island residents made a new resolution: for the next storm, they'll evacuate.

"I don't care if they say we've got a tropical wave coming to the island. I'm leaving," said David Goldman, 20, whose new pickup truck was destroyed by water that rose above its seats.

On Friday, when the rain stopped but the wind was still blustery, residents scrambled to check the damage and start repairs. Many knew they had to move fast, since the island's biggest annual event, the Tarpon Rodeo, is less than a week away.

"We've got about four days to put this back together,"

See ISLE, A-10

### Shrimp boats hit hard by surprise

By KAREN TURNI  
St. Bernard/Picayune Bureau

A late blooming and indecisive Hurricane Danny veered slowly toward the Alabama and Florida Gulf Coast late Friday after raking across the southern tip of Louisiana, capturing and sinking up to 50 commercial fishing boats, ripping apart trailer homes and prompting a midday evacuation.

While property damage ran high, no injuries were reported in Louisiana. Two fatalities in Gulf Shores, Ala., were attributed to the hurricane. A man was killed when his sailboat overturned and broke up in waters just off the beach in Fort Morgan State Park, while another man suffered an apparent heart attack while trying to secure his boat.

After moving ashore as a newborn hurricane in southern Plaquemines Parish at daybreak Friday, the storm lumbered into the Breton Sound east of Houma in St. Bernard Parish where it lingered most of the day. It showed little movement until late Friday, when it started drifting northeast toward summer vacation destinations along

See DANNY, A-8

### Parents: Had to tell on doctor

Defense claim that girl is lying irritates couple

By CHARLIE CHAPPEL  
St. Tammany Bureau

The parents of a 5-year-old girl said Friday they were only trying to act as responsible parents when they reported to authorities that a Mandeville doctor exposed himself to their daughter.

The parents, during an interview at their attorney's office, said they have kept silent about the April 6 incident because they did not want any more harm to come to Dr. Mark Portacci, 49, or his firm.

But "when his lawyer said my daughter has a propensity for lying on the front page of this morning's newspaper, that was it. We had to say something," the girl's father, an engineer, said.

The Times-Picayune is withholding the parents' names to protect the identity of the child.

A St. Tammany Parish grand jury Thursday indicted Portacci on one count of indecent behavior with a juvenile for allegedly exposing himself to the girl at his home near Covington.

Portacci has adamantly denied any wrongdoing through his attorney, Robert Lehman, who could

See INDICT, A-13

### Rail crossing accidents in La. decried

Drivers are 'too cavalier,' state safety leader says

By ED ANDERSON  
Capital Bureau

BATON ROUGE — Louisiana has the nation's third highest rate of accidents between cars and trains because many drivers have become "too cavalier" about stopping at crossings and because the state has "way, way too many crossings," a top safety expert told a legislative task force Friday.

James Champagne, executive director of the Louisiana Highway Safety Commission, said other factors that make the state one of the worst in the nation for such accidents include the lack of warning and stop signs at some crossings.

More people are dying in such accidents in Louisiana.

See RAIL, A-13

### Parish's schools are also feeling sales tax squeeze

By SARA SHIPLEY  
St. Tammany Bureau

St. Tammany schools are feeling the sales tax crunch that's hitting many areas of the parish.

After a whopping 16.5 percent increase last year, school revenues fell to a 2.5 percent increase this year. That left a \$1.5 million gap in expected income for the fiscal year, chief accountant Don Poil said.

"Lackly, we had an increase in other areas, so it was basically a push," he said.

Stidall suffered a 6 percent drop this year. Mandeville officials plan on stagnant receipts, and Covington is running 2 percent under its 6 percent predicted increase.

Although many of the cities blame the drop on

See SCHOOLS, A-13

It's business as usual for most Biloxi casinos. See A-10

HURRICANE DANNY

# Isle: Die-hard homebodies get a scare

From Page 1

said Butch Gaspard, co-owner of the Sand Dollar Marina, next to the rodeo's headquarters. The storm had damaged 20 of Gaspard's 50 slips, all of which are hooked for the rodeo. Water also sloshed through his marina, toppling freezers and straining merchandise across the floor.

Paul Candies, treasurer of the Grand Isle rodeo, said a team was in Grand Isle assessing the damage, and considering whether to postpone the event. Candies said he'd have more information today.

Though Danny caused no major structural damage and no injuries, it still required a formidable cleanup. High winds had pulled shingles off rooftops and scattered debris across the streets. Everything that wasn't tied down, it seemed, made its way into the road: patio furniture, picnic tables, trash cans. A bunch of Christmas trees from a marsh reclamation project washed onto shore and broke apart; the old dead trees were strewn across several blocks.

While officials expected the worst damage to come from the water, not the wind, they were surprised at the severity of the flooding. Many said Danny caused worse flooding than Hurricane Juan in 1985. Residents who ventured out at the height of the storm said the water rose quickly — in places, at high as four feet — and receded nearly as fast.

"Forty-five miles an hour," said resident Paul Frazier, recalling the predicted wind speeds in Thursday's weather reports. "It came up in a matter of minutes. Miraculous."

Many residents, like Frazier, shook their heads in disbelief at the damage, while philosophizing about the weather and the islanders' stalwart nature.

"Most of the time, we don't leave," said longtime resident Frank Samanie, 65, who stood next to a shrimp boat impaled on a wooden post.

"Look, nature," he said. "The only one who can predict that is the one up above you. And he ain't gonna come down here and tell you what it's all about."



Paul Frazier handles the controls from his sunken shrimp boat to his cousin, Jerry Naclo, Friday on Grand Isle. The boat to the left didn't sink but ended up on land. STAFF PHOTO BY SCOTT THREKELD

## What hurricane? Gamblers play on at coast casinos

Only one boat closed in Biloxi

By SUSAN FINCH Staff Writer

BILOXI, MISS. — Though Hurricane Danny dallied about 70 miles offshore, it was pretty much business as usual Friday in the dockside casinos along the Biloxi beachfront.

All but one of the dozen or so casinos along the Mississippi coast were open, albeit to sparser-than-usual crowds. And as of late afternoon local civil defense authorities said they saw no reason to close the casinos.

The lone exception was Gulfport's Copa Casino, which voluntarily shut down Thursday as part of a hurricane preparedness plan filed with the state's gaming commission. The Copa is located on a cruise ship, while the rest of the coast's casinos are on barges strongly lashed to shore-side moorings.

News that the Copa was out of action Friday was being spread to U.S. 90 motorists by a tall flashing sign at the entrance to the ship's long driveway. "We are temporarily closed in preparation for Tropical Storm Danny," the sign flashed. It advised people to stay tuned for the Copa's reopening date.

Other casinos had been preparing for the storm. At the Isle of Capri in Biloxi, employees hauled in patio furniture, benches, and other outdoor items Thursday. At Biloxi's Treasure Bay, hurricane-swept tides around 4 a.m. Friday pulled loose a metal pin holding one of the eight thick arms that hook the pirate ship-shaped casino to metal mooring posts. Workers were busy at midnight replacing the missing pin.

And at Lady Luck Casino, also in Biloxi, a hotline had been set up to let employees know if the casino would remain open.

Inside the casinos, hurricane preparations seemed to center on

limiting tables and machines to accommodate smaller crowds.

"We have about 50 percent of what we ordinarily would open," said Lady Luck General Manager Bob Payton.

That casino and others are familiar with hurricane-related shutdowns. It happened twice in 1986.

But on Friday, casino operators' worst fear seemed to be less the weather than how their customers were reacting to it.

"There is a significant impact every time we have a tropical storm like this," said Bernie Burkholder, president and CEO of Treasure Bay Gaming and Resorts Inc. "A lady asked me what my worst fear was." Burkholder said, "I said, 'All my customers staying home watching the Weather Channel.'"

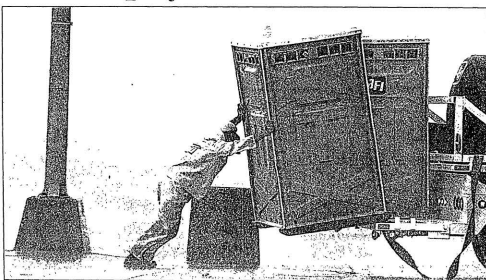
Casino operators could only hope for more of the die-hard gamblers who chose to ride out Friday's wild weather in their favorite casino.

People like Clark and Naomi Mayo, Long Island, N.Y., transplants now living in Florida, who scrubbed their nose at Danny and flew over for a few days of gambling on the Mississippi coast.

"We're hurricanes people, we're from Florida," Naomi said. "Plus, the media hype up everything and they say it's worse than it is, so I say 'What the hell!'"

Then there was Guy Hawkins, a Nashville, Tenn., restaurant kitchen manager whiling away his two vacation days at the blackjack tables.

To someone who spent his boyhood years in Miami, hurricanes are no big deal, he said.



Robert Webb with BFI of Gulfport picks up two portable toilets from the pier in Gulfport, Miss. While Danny's wind speed made it barely a hurricane, the slow-moving storm dumped plenty of rain. STAFF PHOTO BY ALEX BRANCO

"The ready to go down on the beach like Forrest Gump and make my peace with God," Hawkins said.

Construction worker George Horen was content Friday after-

noon nursing a Budweiser at the bar of the Lady Luck. He was having his own hurricane party in a place he felt secure: "I build these places, so I know they're safe."

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