

THE NEW HIGHS AND LOWS OF AIR TRAVEL

Airlines have fresh perks for passengers ... but your suitcases aren't so lucky. **IN BUSINESS, PAGE 37**



The Star-Ledger

4EX59

FINAL EDITION

TODAY'S FORECAST: Partly cloudy, hot and humid, with a T-storm in spots.

at 7 A.M. 75°

at 2 P.M. 87°

at 7 P.M. 85°

DETAILS, PAGE 2

THURSDAY, JULY 31, 2008

50 CENTS

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THE NEWSPAPER FOR NEW JERSEY

Some bosses get sweet Springsteen ticket deal

Sports authority reserved hundreds of seats for sponsors, teams and its own members

BY MAURA McDERMOTT AND PEGGY McGLONE
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

More than 1,000 of the best seats for tonight's final, sold-out Bruce Springsteen concert at Giants Stadium were held back from the general public and sold at face value to local sports teams, sponsors and political figures, according to the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority, which operates the Meadowlands stadium. At least eight prime tickets — sold to

an employee at a Broadway theater — ended up on an internet resale site at five to six times their value.

In all, nearly 2,000 of the 160,000 tickets available for the three shows were sold as "house" tickets for \$98 each. Two sports authority commissioners purchased about 50 tickets each. Others went to legislators, a former United States attorney and a sitting judge, according to a list of recipients the authority released.

"You're in the sports and entertainment industry and a major sponsor of your building would like to purchase 50 tickets to bring some of their big customers," said John Samerjan, spokesman for the sports authority. "That's exactly the kind of thing you want to do."

Even though the sale of house seats is a common industry practice, Samerjan said the authority is re-examining its policies for who gets access to house tickets.

The sales came under scrutiny recently after Democratic U.S. Sen. Frank Lautenberg's bid to buy 40 such tickets as a bonus for attending a \$1,500 fundraiser. Lautenberg's re-election campaign dropped its order after it came under review by the sports authority.

Most of the house tickets for tonight were for seats in the lower bowl, which had a capacity of 22,000 for each Springsteen show, Samerjan said.

Between 64 and 70 floor seats for each show were sold as house tickets, including 10 to 16 in the standing-room "pit" directly in front of the stage, according to the authority.

"You want to take care of people as much as you can, within reason," said Gary Bongiovanni, editor in chief of Pollstar, a concert industry magazine. "It's just easier to say yes than to say no."

Local promoters say the number of tickets held back for VIPs varies with the artist and the tour. Live Nation spokesman [See TICKETS, Page 2]

INSTEAD OF FORECLOSED: SOLD!



JIM PATRONE/STAR-LEDGER

A house on Britton Street in Elizabeth draws a line of potential buyers Saturday as its owner faces foreclosure. The tour was organized by the city and the city-based nonprofit developer Brand New Day on behalf of beleaguered homeowners.

Elizabeth races to give homeowners a graceful way out

BY MARIAM JUKAKU
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

A dozen chatty women and children stepped off a yellow school bus Saturday morning and into a vacant condo on Fifth Street in Elizabeth. Armed with notepads, digital cameras and binders, they sounded optimistic about finding their dream home in the Union County city.

They peppered tour guides with questions about taxes, schools, unfinished basements and the number of bedrooms in each of the dozen properties the group would see. But this wasn't an ordinary real estate tour.

It was a foreclosure bus tour hosted by the city — the first in the state to offer such tours as a public service, according to the New Jersey League of Municipalities.

In Florida, California and Michigan, where the housing foreclosure crisis has hit residents especially hard, these tours are becoming the rage among real estate agents. In New Jersey, which — according to RealtyTrac, a firm that monitors foreclosures — saw a 140 percent jump in foreclosure filings over the last three months, real estate agents are catching on. Tours are being organized in Sussex, Morris, Union

and Warren counties and along the Shore. But this one was different: It was designed not only to help first-time buyers get an affordable home, but to keep troubled homeowners above water.

"Maybe it's better to call it a 'pre-foreclosure tour,'" said the city's housing program director, Susan Ucci. "We want to prevent people from going into foreclosure."

Only one of the homes on the tour had been repossessed by the lender; the rest were nearing foreclosure. Tour guides — carrying binders of information to

[See FORECLOSING, Page 15]

Court OKs regulations on animal treatment

Strict standards sought on welfare of livestock

BY KATE COSCARELLI
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

The state Supreme Court yesterday upheld most of New Jersey's regulations on the treatment of farm animals — including those that allow farmers to confine pigs to cramped crates, stress chickens to produce extra eggs and remove turkeys' toes without painkillers.

The court, however, said the Department of Agriculture must do a better job determining exactly who is properly trained to perform such procedures to make sure they are sanitary and minimize pain.

In a decision closely watched by animal rights activists, the court said as a whole, state regulations on the treatment of livestock are "consistent with the meaning of the term 'humane.'"

"The dispute before this court has nothing to do with anyone's love for animals, or with the way in which any of us treats our pets. Rather, it requires a balancing of the interests of people and organizations who would zealously safeguard the welfare of farm animals ... with the equally significant interest of those who make their living in animal husbandry" and contribute to the food supply, wrote Justice Helen Hoens for a unanimous court.

However, while the court said the Agriculture Department seriously considered the welfare of livestock, "we find in those regulations both unworkable standards and an unacceptable delegation of authority to an ill-defined category of presumed experts."

The court also called the practice of tail docking — amputating part of a [See FARMS, Page 20]

Israel's scandal-plagued leader angrily says he will resign



BY MARK LAVIE
ASSOCIATED PRESS

JERUSALEM — Facing burgeoning corruption accusations and plummeting popularity, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said yesterday he will resign in September, an announcement that throws his country into political turmoil and clouds the prospects for peace with the Palestinians and Syria.

Olmert said he would not run in his party's primary election Sept. 17 and would step down afterward to

allow his successor to form a government. Because of Israel's political system, however, he could serve well into next year.

Olmert's decision will end a long public career tainted by Israel's bloody and inconclusive war in Lebanon in 2006 and by charges in recent months of corruption.

Political analysts had been predicting the resignation of the 62-year-old premier for weeks as details of the latest allegations dominated the news.

The latest allegations — like the previous ones, involving actions before he became prime minister — are that Olmert double- and triple-billed trips abroad to Jewish institutions, pocketing the difference or financing trips for relatives.

Other accusations include a shady real estate deal and questionable political appointments.

Morris Talansky, a 76-year-old American Jewish businessman, testified in a Jerusalem courtroom that he handed envelopes stuffed with tens of

thousands of dollars to Olmert, in part financing a luxurious lifestyle of expensive hotels and fat cigars.

Talansky gave lengthy public testimony for days, defending his allegations under cross-examination by Olmert's attorneys.

Olmert's brief address yesterday from his official Jerusalem residence included harsh criticism of the police investigations into the accusations.

He said he was choosing the public good over personal justice. "I was [See ISRAEL, Page 8]

IN OTHER NEWS

N.J. has fewer illegal immigrants

A study said the sharp drop in the illegal immigrant population, both here and across the nation, was due in part to the economic downturn. Page 13.

Cash for farmland preservation

The Garden State Preservation Trust detailed recommendations for doling out \$91 million in preservation money from its rapidly dwindling fund. Page 17.

New stance on Rone penalty

The Essex prosecutor reversed course and asked a judge not to force Newark Councilwoman Dana Rone to step down after her conviction. Page 25.

LOCAL NEWS

Ex-day care center chief is convicted

The former manager of a Newark center, whose operators have been accused of using state

Pudge Rodriguez heading to Yanks

In their second trade in a week, the Bronx Bombers said beleaguered reliever Kyle Farnsworth to the



What's ahead for TV's 'freshmen'

The writers strike last winter crippled production of some great new shows, ending the first seasons

It's time to start Yuletide shopping

Yes, it's July. But retailers are talking about price increases of up to 15 percent this year on

H&G/TODAY

BUSINESS

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PHOTOS BY JIM PATHE/THE STAR-LEDGER

Tanya Storey of Roselle Park and her sons, Tavares, left, and Larenz, check an Elizabeth home that the city hopes to see sold before foreclosure.

FORECLOSING

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE

Elizabeth looks to ease pain

match prospective buyers with sellers — were members of the city's Home Improvement Program and the nonprofit housing group Brand New Day. The nine prospective buyers on the tour, all women, were pre-qualified for mortgages by Brand New Day, and all took and passed classes for first-time home-buyers.

Elizabeth's program stands out, Ueci said, with benefits for all involved. Homeowners don't go through the painful and credit-ruining foreclosure process. First-time buyers get a bargain on a home and "we get an occupied house instead of a foreclosed house in the neighborhood."

Bill Dressel, executive director of the New Jersey League of Municipalities, said this is the first he's heard of a city working with a nonprofit group to show off nearly foreclosed homes.

"I think it's absolutely brilliant," Dressel said, adding he wants to promote the program across the state. "It cuts through a lot of bureaucracy, and it literally matches people in homes where they want to be."

For municipalities, keeping homes occupied means property values and ratables won't decline. The likelihood of squatters or drug dealers moving into the neighborhood is decreased. And it guards against vandalism and theft.

The foreclosure crisis — which led President Bush to sign a \$318

billion bill yesterday in support of cheaper mortgages — has fanned an interest in foreclosure properties. Since November, for instance, users looking for homes on a real estate website (trulia.com) have been able to add "foreclosure" as a search option, alongside the number of bedrooms and bathrooms.

Trulia spokesman Ken Shuman said the change was in response to customer demand. "It was a natural addition for us," he said.

The site saw 5 million viewers last month, and 8 percent of the searches nationwide and 7 percent of the searches in New Jersey were for foreclosed homes, steady increases from the spring.

During the tour, Irvington resident Rhonda Franklin wondered out loud about changing the layout of one of the houses. "You can knock down the walls and make the smaller bedroom into a

... a walk-in closet! That's what I'm talking about," Lagretta Stephens of Elizabeth said.

Most of the owners were not home during Saturday's tour, but one owner, Rosa Cruz, enthusiastically welcomed the group, hoping for a sale that might save her from foreclosure.

A single mother of two college girls, she bought the single-family, three-bedroom home on Atlantic Street three years ago on an adjustable-rate mortgage. She works two jobs — at a preschool during the day and at a hotel during the night, to help put her daughters through college.

She can no longer afford her mortgage and wants to sell the home and move to an apartment in Elizabeth. Last year she put

the house on the market but it didn't sell, one of her daughters said.

"I barely see my mom," said daughter, Yelitza Vasquez, 21. "She's sad, but she's dealing with it."

Sandra Johnson, from Edison, said she was hesitant to look at homes that are near foreclosure but came on the tour because she was curious about what the market has to offer. "The tour is beautiful," she said. "Everybody's reminding you about what you can afford. A Realtor's not reminding you."

Organizers are planning another tour in September. And cities across the state may soon fol-

low suit. Jacques Howard, economic director of Plainfield, said the tours "make perfect sense." He plans on rolling out a comprehensive package of programs to battle foreclosure in his Union County city. He hopes to include home foreclosure tours.

When homes are vacant, "the city's losing, the bank's losing, everyone's losing," Howard said.

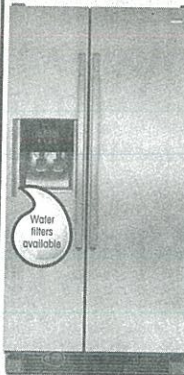
Dressel, from the League of Municipalities agrees. "This idea seems so obvious, why wouldn't you do this?" he said. "I'm a cheerleader. I'll be out there with my pompons, cheering this one on."

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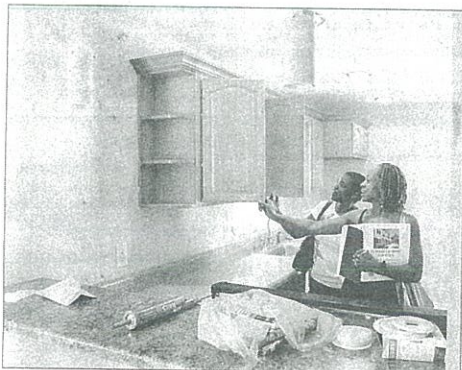


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The kitchen of a close-to-foreclosed house on Rebecca Place in Elizabeth draws the interest of Rhonda Franklin of Irvington, left, and Carlotta Allen of Elizabeth.

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