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Observer Investigation | Second of a Three-Day Series

DWI:
SOBERING
ACQUITTALS

DA: 'Judges are not following the law'



JEFF SENER - STAFF PHOTOS

Charlotte-Mecklenburg police Capt. Dave Haggist checks a driver's license during a DWI checkpoint on South Boulevard. DWI suspects who go to trial in Mecklenburg are more likely to get off than those in most N.C. counties, the Observer found.

Warrants out in Iraq for Chalabi

Discredited U.S. adviser charged with counterfeiting

Chalabi nephew also accused of murder of finance official in May

BY TOM LASSETER
AND WARREN P. STROBEL
Knight Ridder

BAGHDAD, Iraq — An Iraqi judge has issued an arrest warrant for Ahmad Chalabi, the one-time Iraqi exile long favored by the Pentagon and Vice President Dick Cheney, accusing him of counterfeiting Iraqi currency, it was learned Sunday. The judge in Baghdad simultaneously issued a warrant for Chalabi's nephew, Salem Chalabi, on murder charges. The charges are the latest — and perhaps most serious — fall from grace for Chalabi, whose Iraqi National Congress received more than \$40 million in U.S. government funds and who

was seated near first lady Laura Bush during President Bush's State of the Union address in January.

Chalabi also was accused by senior U.S. officials in May of leaking to Iran highly classified information showing that U.S. intelligence was breaking Iran's codes.

Chalabi denied the latest charges and said he was returning to Baghdad to defend himself. "I'm not going to stand still while these charges are out there," Chalabi, who was in Iran, told CNN. He called the allegations "political."



A. Chalabi

A Chalabi spokesman in

SEE LOBBYIST | 6A

MORE INSIDE

4A | Arrests, seizures disrupt terror plots, Bush adviser says.

Risky Roads

Three of every 10 Americans will be involved in an alcohol-related crash. In the past decade, such accidents killed more than 5,500 people in North Carolina and more than 4,000 in South Carolina. This three-part Observer special report begins an occasional series examining what happens when people drink and drive in the Carolinas.

Inside

8A | Mecklenburg County's highest, lowest convicting judges.

8A | DWI treatment court offers hope for recovery.

9A | The Intoxilyzer: How it works.

Coming Tuesday
How some DWI suspects improve their odds of getting off.

BY GARY L. WRIGHT, AMES ALEXANDER
AND TED MELLNIK
Staff Writers

Police in Charlotte stopped a suspected drunken driver last summer who had forced another car off the road. They found open bottles of brandy and beer in his car, and he didn't remember his age or Social Security number.

Mecklenburg District Judge Jerome Leonard let him go.

Police stopped another driver who stumbled out of his car and had to grab the door to keep from falling. He couldn't recite the alphabet.

Leonard let him go.

Another DWI suspect knocked over a tree. When a police officer asked him to touch his nose with his fingertip, he hit it with his knuckle. Twice.

Leonard let him go, too.

Court records show they were among 50 drunken driving suspects Leonard tried in a 14-month period after tests showed their alcohol level was right at 0.08 percent, just above the legal limit and enough, according to N.C. law, for a conviction. Leonard acquitted all 50.

That includes more than 30 suspects who failed or performed poorly on field sobriety tests, according to sworn affidavits by arresting officers. Ten were unsteady on their feet. Three had been driving at night without headlights. Two ran red lights.

Police and prosecutors say Leonard is the Charlotte region's most lenient judge in drunken driving cases.

Leonard said he works to do what's right. "We have taken an oath to uphold the law," he said. "If there's a reasonable doubt, I have a duty to find that person not guilty."

SEE MECKLENBURG | 8A

A Mecklenburg judge acquitted 50 out of 50 suspects who tested at 0.08. He says he's doing his duty and upholding the law.



Some police officers say they've come to expect that many charged with DWI will be acquitted. "It really feels like we're spitting in the wind sometimes," says Pineville police officer Bill Wright.



JEFF WILLHELM - STAFF PHOTO

All Star pitcher Andrew "Biscuit" Martin (center) and his Morganton teammates celebrate after returning home Sunday.

Hometown crowd greets the boys of Morganton

BY KAREN CIMINO
Staff Writer

MORGANTON — Eleven Little Leaguers from Morganton are living a dream.

On Sunday, the Morganton All Stars returned home after defeating Georgia's best and becoming the first U.S. team to qualify for this year's Little League Baseball World Series in Williamsport, Pa.

They're now one of the top 16 teams of 11- and 12-year-old players in the world and have a shot at being the first N.C. baseball team to bring home the World Series title.

And Morganton is counting on them. Many are hoping exposure in the national media will put Morganton, population 17,000, on the map as a baseball town.

SEE ALL STARS | 7A

On TV

Morganton will play at least three televised games in the series. The first game is against Davenport, Iowa on ESPN at 1 p.m. Aug. 20. More information, 7A.

Note for Weekend Subscribers

During the Observer's coverage of the Carolina Panthers season, weekend subscribers will receive Monday's paper as part of their regular subscription plan. If you do not want to receive these newspapers, call Circulation at (800) 532-5350.

Weather

MOSTLY CLEAR: High: 86. Low: 59. Plenty of sun, warmer temperatures. Muggy tonight. **Full forecast, 6B**

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