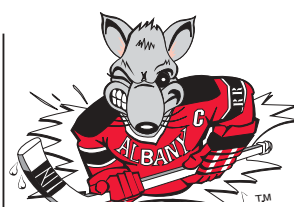


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**Nine in a row**

The River Rats find they have a real home ice disadvantage.

**Sports/C1**

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ALBANY, NEW YORK ■ THURSDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2004

**Adding up**

U.S. cell phone subscribers reached about **159 million** in 2003, up from 34 million in 1995



The number of households with Internet access increased to **54.6 percent** in 2003, from 26.2 percent in 1998



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Drivers in the typical U.S. household traveled **21,188 miles** in 2001, up from 15,100 miles in 1990



**39,955 doctoral degrees** were conferred in 2002. Seventy-four percent went to U.S. citizens; 26 percent to citizens of another country



Americans consumed an average of **30.5 pounds** of cheese in 2002, up from 17.5 pounds in 1980



ASSOCIATED PRESS, TIMES UNION

## A view of America you can count on

Census Bureau offers tallies on numerous facets of people's lifestyles in its statistical abstract

By **GENARO C. ARMAS**  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Americans are on the road more than ever. Drivers in a typical household log enough miles every year to travel between New York and Los Angeles almost eight times — about 21,200 miles.

On those road trips, they might snack on cheese. Americans consume almost 31 pounds of it a year. Lots of people — almost 29 million — try to burn off those calories by joining health clubs.

Those and myriad other facts and figures can be found in the latest edition of the Census Bureau's Statistical Abstract of the United States, a 1,000-page tome on life in America.

"It's Uncle Sam's almanac," said Glenn King, the bureau economist who oversees production of the annual compendium.

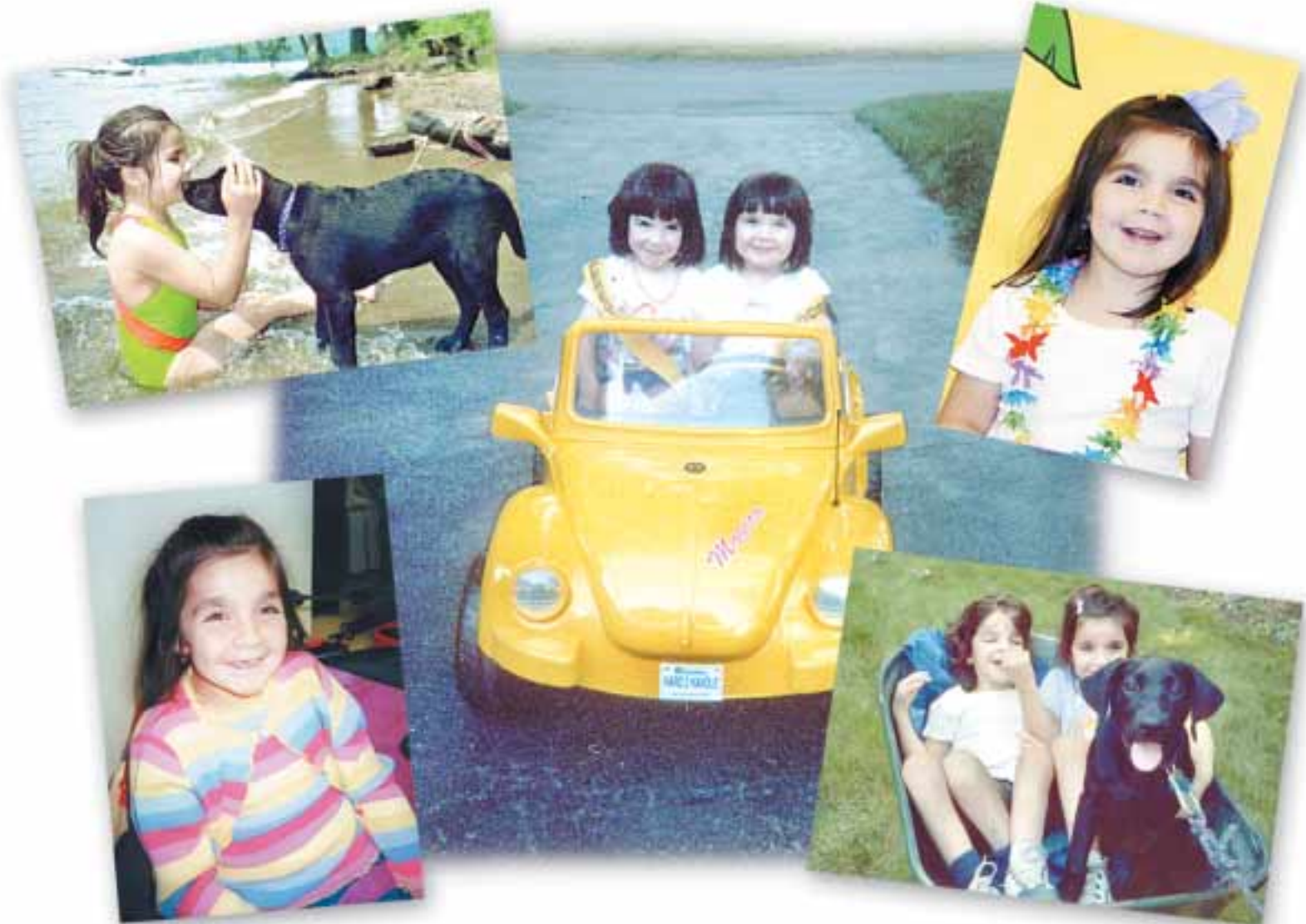
The tables are compiled from government and private sources, and range from the serious — 9 percent of high school students reported being threatened or injured with a weapon on school

property in 2001 — to the sublime — about one-quarter of Americans visited an art museum at least once in 2002.

Some other tidbits:

■ Americans like to keep it short on their cellphones: Last year, the average call lasted 2.87 minutes, while the average monthly bill was \$49.91.

■ When it comes to home prices, the West isn't best. Existing Please see **AMERICA A9** ▶



SABRINA AND ALYSSA BARBIERO from family snapshots

## Troops pepper boss on safety

Donald Rumsfeld hears complaints about planning, armor from soldiers in Kuwait who are bound for Iraq

By **MARK MAZZETTI**  
Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — Anxious troops awaiting deployment to Iraq confronted Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld with questions Wednesday during his brief visit to their camp in the Kuwait desert, demanding to know why U.S. forces were still being sent into the violent country with insufficient protection against deadly insurgents.

Rumsfeld, who invited "tough questions" from the troops, got what he asked for when a number of them also took him to task for the poor condition of the equipment given to the National Guard and for the Pentagon's "stop loss" policy that has kept thousands of troops on active duty beyond their discharge dates.

During the meeting with troops at Camp Buehring, one soldier asked Rumsfeld why some troops were forced to rummage through local landfills searching for scraps of armor to attach to their vehicles.

"Our vehicles are not armored. We're digging pieces of rusted scrap metal and compromised ballistic glass ... to put on our vehicles to take into combat," said

Please see **IRAQ A15** ▶

## Death reunites sisters who shared life

Younger of two girls afflicted with rare disease to be laid to rest next to sibling today

By **PAUL GRONDAHL**  
Staff writer

NISKAYUNA — Even late at night, fighting sleep in the back seat of her mom's minivan, Alyssa Barbiero, 8, would always remember her sister as they drove by the cemetery where she was buried, a mile from home.

"Good night, 'Bri," Alyssa would say. It took a lot of effort. Those were all the words the little girl could manage to say in honor of her big sister, Sabrina.

A neurological disorder had slowly robbed Alyssa's speech and stolen her muscle control. She spoke mostly by pushing buttons on a computer keyboard. Alyssa would fall into painful spasms that caused her tiny body to pulsate and writhe painfully, uncontrollably. No drugs helped.

Alyssa had once drawn strength and comfort from Sabrina, who had suffered the

Please see **GIRLS A10** ▶

### About the disorder

**Neurodegeneration with Brain Iron Accumulation (NBIA)** is a rare, inherited, neurological movement disorder. It is a progressive degeneration of the nervous system.

There is no known cause and symptoms vary greatly from case to case, as does life expectancy. It typically involves jerky or spastic movements, vision problems or blindness and loss of speech. Mental

abilities usually do not deteriorate.

The disorder has been associated with abnormal accumulation of iron in certain areas of the brain. Vitamin and drug treatments have not worked.

The Barbiero family asks in lieu of flowers or gifts for people to make a donation in memory of their daughters to NBIA, 2082 Monaco Court, El Cajon, CA 92019-4234 or visit: <http://www.NBIAdisorders.org>.

## Delmar killing resonates on Rochester campus

Fraternity brothers, friends, classmates wonder where Porco case will lead as one of their own faces scrutiny

By **SIMONE SEBASTIAN**  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — On the riverfront campus of the University of Rochester, the members of Sigma Phi Epsilon have a reputation for being a tightknit group of academically minded young men, who boast on their Web site of having the highest grade-point averages of any of the school's fraternities.

As a 19-year-old graduate of Bethlehem High School in 2002, freshman Christopher Porco seemed to have everything the fraternity savored — an interest in biomedical engineering, a diploma from a top academic high school, a long-standing dedication to competitive swimming, and a place in the local ROTC unit.

In the hours and days after Porco's father, Peter, was killed and his mother, Joan, savagely beaten in their Delmar

Please see **PORCO A12** ▶

**A PATROL CAR** is stationed around the clock outside the Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity in Rochester.



CINDY SCHULTZ/TIMES UNION

**INSIDE**

Vapor alcohol machines are getting a cold reception here.

**Region/B1**

**UPCOMING**

The best-looking felons on earth are back at it in "Ocean's 12."

**Friday**

**INDEX**

Business	<b>E</b>	Crosswords	<b>D7,E9</b>	Opinion	<b>A16</b>
Calendar	<b>B2</b>	Horoscope	<b>D6</b>	Scoreboard	<b>C6</b>
Classified	<b>E5</b>	Lottery	<b>A2</b>	State	<b>B3</b>
Comics	<b>D6</b>	Movies	<b>Preview</b>	Stocks	<b>E2</b>
		Nation/World	<b>A3</b>	Television	<b>D5</b>
		Obituaries	<b>B13</b>	Weather	<b>B2</b>

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# GIRLS: Sisters shared life and a deadly disease

▼ CONTINUED FROM A1

Now, she was the only one. Neurodegeneration with Brain Iron Accumulation, NBIA, is an exceedingly rare disease of the nervous system. It occurs due to a recessive gene in both parents, who are carriers and have no symptoms. Often confused with cerebral palsy, there is no known cause or cure. There is a one-in-a-million chance for a child to be diagnosed

with NBIA. Among parents with one child who suffers from NBIA, the likelihood that their other children will have NBIA is from 25 percent to 50 percent. The odds caught up with Genaro and Anabela Barbiero. Both girls died in the past eight months. Today, they will bury Alyssa beside her sister in Most Holy Redeemer Cemetery off Route 7 in Niskayuna.

Sabrina died on March 21 at age 9. Alyssa died Monday. She was 8. "I'm numb. It hasn't sunk in yet that they're both gone," their mother said Wednesday. "I was preparing how to get through Christmas without one," she said. "Now, how will we get through it without two?" she asked. While other parents were feeling stressed out about toy shopping and decorating for the holidays, the Barbieros were struggling to come to terms with their loss even while they celebrated their daughters' brief, joy-filled lives. Alyssa loved her black Labrador retriever, Emmy, more than anything. Except maybe the beach. When she could no longer walk, Alyssa would sit in a baby stroller and let the dog pull her around the neighborhood. Even when her body was breaking down, Alyssa loved to float on her back in a lake or a pool. Her dad's arms cradled her as she floated and she gazed up into a wide, blue sky. Into heaven. To 'Bri.

The girls would say a prayer in bed each night, "Now I lay me down to sleep..." They had put their beds side-by-side in the same bedroom. Alyssa ended her prayer with, "Love you, 'Bri.'" "Love you, 'Ly 'Ly,'" her sister Sabrina would respond. Alyssa usually fell asleep with a SpongeBob SquarePants book on her chest instead of a teddy bear. Both girls were third-graders at Birchwood Elementary School in Niskayuna when they died and had previously attended Rosendale School. Their classmates have twice made sympathy cards. "I'm very sorry that Alyssa died," Felicia wrote. "I almost always think of the good things like she's up in heaven with her sister getting anything she wants." On her card, Felicia depicted the sisters as two angels, smiling, floating above the clouds. Classmates at Rosendale planted a red maple in Sabrina's memory. They tied purple ribbons on the branches. Purple was Sabrina's favorite color. The kids replace the ribbons when they begin to fade. Her classmates will plant a tree for Alyssa, too. "In class she brought joy," Megan wrote. "I loved her beautiful smile. Alyssa will be happy in heaven."

With Sabrina's death, the decline came slowly and inexorably, over the course of a year. The parents had time to prepare. With Alyssa, it was abrupt and shocking. Three weeks ago, she appeared stable. None of the doctors who treat this disorder or the other families who have children who suffer from it have seen such a rapid death. The only explanation doctors have offered is that Alyssa never recovered from the emotional trauma of her sister's death. The little girl may have died of a broken heart. "She missed her sister so bad," their mother said of Alyssa. "They didn't like to be apart. Whenever one was gone, the other one looked for her sister."

The couple — he's 38 and she's 39 — have no other children and plan not to have any more. Their relatives are now being tested for the disorder. So far, it has not been found in anyone else in their family. The couple moved from Montreal six years ago. They relocated partly for the husband's job, but also because the Canadian school system does not mainstream children with special needs. "We wanted them to have a full and regular life as long as they could," the father said. Their daughters attended mostly mainstream classes in the Niskayuna school district. Their father, a research chemist at Schenectady International, is a board member of NBIA Disorders Association. Their mother quit her job to devote herself to her daughters' care. The couple raised \$25,000 in honor of Sabrina last year. His company's foundation contributed \$50,000. The license plate on their mom's van reads SABALY, the first three letters of her daughters' two names joined together. The girls were inseparable, even when Sabrina was pulling Alyssa's hair. Or when Alyssa fought back with a bite to Sabrina's arm and ended up on the living room stairs, in timeout.

SABALY. It was the sisters' secret word, the middle name their sister gave the dog, Emmy, who Alyssa got as a puppy as her Make-A-Wish Foundation gift. Emmy nuzzled alongside Sabrina, comforting the girl as her body shook with terrifying spasms. The dog still sleeps in the bedroom that the sisters shared, near the spot where Sabrina died. On Wednesday, Emmy was out of sorts, barking and jumping on visitors in unusual behavior. Even a dog could sense there was something terribly wrong. There are two girls buried alongside each other in a cemetery today. There are no answers. Only a secret word. SABALY. Forever.

► Paul Grondahl can be reached at 454-5623 or by e-mail at pgrondahl@timesunion.com

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