



Accuser's mom cries on stands

SANTA MARIA, Calif. (AP) - Holding her arms out to the jury, the mother of Michael Jackson's teenage accuser sobbed and pleaded, "Please don't judge me!" as she recounted her family's involvement with the pop star in dramatic testimony Wednesday.

The woman's turn on the witness stand came after Judge Rodney S. Melville allowed her to testify despite her refusal to discuss alleged welfare fraud — an issue on which the defense had hoped to attack her credibility. She invoked the Fifth Amendment in fending off that line of questioning.



Michael Jackson in court.

Looking directly at the jury during a convoluted and sometimes tearful account, the woman once punctuated her words by snapping her fingers and later affected the German accent of a Jackson associate. She addressed news reporters directly at one point, and at other times glanced at Jackson, who sat motionless at the defense table.

Jackson, 46, is accused of molesting a 13-year-old former cancer patient, plying the boy with alcohol, and holding his family captive in February and March 2003 to get them to help rebut a damaging documentary.

The accuser's mother said following the broadcast of the documentary showing Jackson and her children, the pop star convinced her that her children were in danger, that there were "killers" after them, and that he was the only one who could protect them.

"I thought, 'What a nice guy,'" she said. "I was just like a sponge, believing him, trusting him." She recounted what she sarcastically called Jackson's "lovey dovey speech" at a Florida hotel room, in which Jackson told the family "in a very male voice" that he would be their father figure and protector.

She said Jackson told the family "that he loves us, that he cares about us, we're family. ... That we were in the back of the line, now we're in the front of the line, that he's going to protect us from those killers."

Later she added: "And you know what? They ended up being the killers."

Asked by Senior Deputy District Attorney Ron Zonen about her memory of the events, she pointed to her head and exclaimed: "Some things are just burned in here."

She then offered an account, in conflict with testimony of other witnesses, in which she described seeing Jackson lick her son's head during a February 2003 flight from Miami to California on a private jet.

"Everyone was asleep. I had not slept for so long," she said. "I got up. I figured this was my chance to figure out what was going on back there. And that's when I saw Michael licking (the boy's) head."

She sobbed, pounded her chest and said, "I thought I was seeing things. I thought it was me."

During more than four hours of testimony, defense
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West Las Vegans want store

By Lés Pierres Streater
Sentinel-Voice

More than forty people, primarily residents of West Las Vegas, and members of ACORN, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, rallied on the parking lot of the vacant Vons Grocery Store located at 1061 W. Owens Avenue, near Martin Luther King Blvd., demanding a new neighborhood grocery store to replace the former one. ACORN is one of the nation's largest community organizations of low- and moderate-income families, working together for social justice and stronger communities.

The former Vons had existed in the community for over nine years and served as the only major grocery store in the neighborhood encompassing a five mile radius. Residents living there patronized the store for their basic needs - food, beverages and household supplies - shopping at the deli, bakery, pharmacy, liquor and produce departments.

The building has no replacement tenant, and the property is currently under a lease interest only agreement with Vons, according to the property owners. Contact has been made with various independent and national gro-



Sentinel-Voice photo by Lés Pierres Streater

Members of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) joined with West Las Vegans for a rally to protest the lack of a major grocery store in the area.

cers to secure a new tenant according to Dan Adamson, a commercial real estate agent with Return on Investment Group, its logo ROI.

"At this present time there is a letter of intent from a group who is negotiating to obtain the leasing rights to the property," Adamson said. Vons expressed that while sympathetic to the needs of the community to acquire a viable grocery store, they deem that the situation here does not fit in with their operational plans, according to Adamson's report on his conversations with the grocery

chain's head office.

Attempts to contact Vons corporate headquarters in California by telephone and e-mail to obtain information on what they plan to do with the property was not successful and no messages were returned.

Veronica Dunn-Jones, chair of ACORN local chapter, and a resident of West Las Vegas, spoke to the members of the rally about why they were protesting the lack of a grocery store in their neighborhood as they chanted in question and response style: "What do we want? A gro-

cery store! When do we want it? Now!"

"We're basically asking the city to be accountable in helping us get a new grocery store. We've been without a store here for about a year, and we want the city to come in and assist us through some city funding or incentives to get another grocery store. We have tried to get two appointments to speak to the mayor (Goodman) about this process, and both appointments were cancelled. So, this is basically why we are out here today organizing and bring-

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Cigars not safe option to cigarettes

By Makebra M. Anderson
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - With the glamorization of cigar smoking among public figures such as actors Morgan Freeman and Bill Cosby, basketball great Michael Jordan, and singer 50 Cent, many youth believe cigars are a healthier alternative to cigarettes.

The American Cancer Society says: "Many people perceive cigar smoking as being more civilized and less dangerous than cigarette smoking. Yet, a single large cigar can contain as much tobacco as an entire pack of cigarettes."



"When you look at the advertising and the marketing particularly in the realm of hip-hop, cigars are very much part of every advertisement and every video. That attention has popularized cigar use in a big way."

—Sherri Watson-Hyde

Youth that smoke cigarettes are more likely to use other tobacco products. The most common replacement for cigarettes is cigars. Popular in the music and movie industry, some cigars —

Philly's, Dutch Masters, Backwoods and Garcia Vegas — are blunted (the cigar is cut down the middle and the tobacco is removed) and used to smoke marijuana and other substances, while oth-

ers like Black & Mild (Blacks) are smoked as an alternative to cigarettes.

"When you look at the advertising and the marketing, particularly in the realm of hip-hop, cigars are very much part of every advertisement and every video. That attention has popularized cigar use in a big way because young people want to emulate some of the images they see, which make it a trendy thing to do," said Sherri Watson-Hyde, executive director of the National African American Tobacco Prevention Network (NAATPN).

Donald St.Claire, a stu-
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