

**The drudge report**  
Summer jobs are seldom viewed as fun, but they help teenagers pay the bills | **B8**



# Life

The Columbus Dispatch  
THURSDAY | **B**  
JULY 27, 2006

WWW.DISPATCH.COM



Merle Haggard, enjoying some downtime in the Muddy Moose Bar at the Sportsmen's Lodge Event Center in Studio City, Calif.

LOS ANGELES TIMES

## Q&A | MERLE HAGGARD

# REBEL WITH A WORK ETHIC

Singer maintains grueling schedule while planning film, making music

By Aaron Beck  
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

**A**t age 69, country singer Merle Haggard tours as hard as anyone else. "I do a couple of trainloads a year, maybe three," Haggard said on a recent weekday morning, just after finishing breakfast at his home not far from Mount Shasta in northern California.

He will park the caravan after his show Saturday at Beulah Park in Grove City and subsequent summer concerts. Come autumn, an album of duets with George Jones and a tribute to Buck Owens and Don Rich — another duet production, with Vince Gill — will be in the works.

Haggard will also devote some time to a movie of his life. "We've raised the money. Now we're at the point of finding someone I trust who has made successful films — someone like Robert Duvall," Haggard said. "He is interested and is without something to do, so he likely will be involved."

Such a life could provide fodder for five or six movies: Few other people have lived such a colorful existence. The son of parents who had fled the Dust Bowl in Oklahoma, he spent his toddler years in the oil fields of Bakersfield, Calif. — in a converted refrigerator car from a train.

He was 9 when his father died of a brain tumor. Soon after,

See **HAGGARD** Page **B3**

### SO TO SPEAK

## Perfect lawn mows down competition to adorn bags

When it comes to grass, Nick Ashooh has the sharpest blades in town — if several million bags of fertilizer are an indication.

When he walked into a store to buy lawn products this year, he found his yard featured on bags of Scotts Turf Builder.

"And, of course, I've told everyone I know — twice."

It has made him something of a lawn celebrity: One guy even asked for an autograph.

His ascendancy into the grass upper class began two years ago, when a man knocked on the door of his home in Tartan Fields, the Dublin golf-course community.

"He said, 'Gee, you have a beautiful yard here,'" Ashooh recalled.

The man was a sort of lawn talent scout from Scotts Miracle-Gro, the Marysville corporation that makes lawn and garden products. In seeking lawns to feature in advertising, Scotts



JOE BLUNDO



MIKE MUNDEN | DISPATCH

Brenda and Nick Ashooh in their front yard — the one pictured on millions of bags of Scotts Turf Builder fertilizer

looks for verdant yards whose owners do the work themselves.

Ashooh and his wife, Brenda, fit the criteria — right down to using Scotts products. She tends the shrubs and

flowers; he tends the lawn.

It's a relaxing escape from his job as senior vice president of corporate communications for American Electric Power, he said.

Two weeks after the knock, Scotts returned with photographers, lights, extra flowers and three models — two children and a dog.

"Which is kind of funny because I'd never let two kids and a dog go on my lawn," Mr. Ashooh said.

He didn't witness his lawn's photo session, but Mrs. Ashooh did.

"They were carrying trays of flowers out of this truck," she said. "They embedded them in my beds to enhance them. That went on for like an hour. They had two people on the sidewalk saying, 'No, take that one out and move it to the right.' And they were fluffing up the grass with rakes."

After several hours of primping and shooting, the crew departed with no promises of stardom for the lawn.

When it failed to show up on any Scotts products or advertisements last year, the couple figured that their grass hadn't made the cut.

The big day came in the spring. Mrs. Ashooh remembers it well.

"He calls me and says: 'Bren, you won't believe this. I'm standing in Wal-Mart, and our lawn is on the

See **BLUNDO** Page **B3**

### PUBLISHING

## 'Da Vinci' mania subsiding

By Hillel Italie  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — It couldn't last forever, right?

Simmered in three years of lawsuits, religious debates and conspiracy theories — and brought to a boil in May by the Hollywood movie — the craze for all things *Da Vinci Code* is finally fading, publishers and booksellers agree.

"I would definitely say it's slowing down," said Barnes & Noble fiction buyer Sessalee Hensley.

"Once everybody got past the movie, the whole thing peaked."

"Spring definitely was the hottest time for this kind of book," said editor Mark Tavani of Ballantine Books, which released Steve Berry's *The Templar Legacy* — one of many *Da Vinci*-like novels to make best-seller lists earlier this year.

"It seems now that the wave has reached its end."

The conspiracy thriller by Dan Brown, with its suggestion that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married, came out in March 2003.

The book sold more than 60 million copies while inspiring a parade of critical scorn and church condemnation — and (unsuccessful) allegations of rip-offs from other writers.

Not only did *The Da Vinci Code* keep selling, but the market for anything similar kept growing.

The phenomenon apparently hit its height with the May 19 release of the film, a box-office hit directed by Ron Howard and starring Tom Hanks.

"*The Da Vinci Code* certainly created great opportunities for a number of authors to expand their readership, but in all likelihood we will not see a market like that again," said Allison Elsbey, manager of genre fiction for Borders and Waldenbooks.

The book remains a best-seller on the *New York Times* paperback list, but no longer does a simple

See **MANIA** Page **B3**

### COMMENTARY



NBC

A shot from an *Office* "webisode"

## Ad-clogged 'webisodes' prove tough to load, watch

By Alessandra Stanley  
NEW YORK TIMES NEWS SERVICE

The "webisode" is to network television what an M&M's Mini is to candy: It can please but can't satisfy.

NBC is showing several two-minute vignettes of *The Office* on its Web site — the first in a series of Internet-only segments that constitute an original episode: an accounting mystery at the Dunder Mifflin company.

The setup: The books are short \$3,000.

Although the boss, Michael Scott (Steve Carell), is considered the most-likely suspect — he once claimed a \$50 lunch with a client, then submitted a receipt from J.Crew — protocol demands that the other employees be interrogated first.

Most of the secondary characters are featured, but Carell, the star of the sitcom, doesn't make an appearance into something like outtakes from the remainder bin.

Otherwise, the NBC offerings are better than most: ABC, USA and other networks vaunt original

See **WEBISODES** Page **B3**