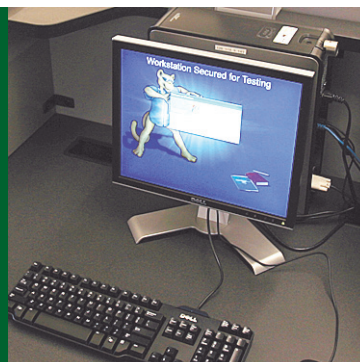


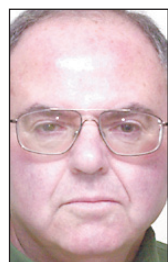
BUSINESS



Switching data from one computer to another can be a bit of a challenge. Page C3

Analyst has got it all wrong

I was listening to National Public Radio, KQED, a few days ago, and the moderator was asking the head of an investment service about the reasons for the dollar's decline.



Bud Stevenson
Dollars & sense

First, there were anecdotes about \$7 cups of coffee and \$50 cab rides in Paris, and how expensive European luxury goods were becoming for Americans. Then there were some facts about just how much the dollar has dropped.

In 2001, it took 87 cents to buy 1 euro, while now it takes about \$1.42 to get that same unit of currency.

Why has the slump in the dollar been so severe? According to the guest, the two main reasons were the relative weakness of the U.S. economy and the recent turmoil in the mortgage market. As I listened to Mark Zandi, head of Moody's Investors' Service, I wondered how I, a humble stockbroker, could have the temerity to disagree so strongly with the highly-paid analyst.

But I think he had it all wrong. The dollar has lost much of its value in relation to the euro, but much of that decline has been happening for years. Further, the U.S. currency has not dropped versus the Japanese yen, which now stands at almost 118 to the dollar. It has also remained even with the yuan, since the Chinese currency is pegged to the dollar.

To suggest that the euro has strengthened because the European currency area has a much stronger economy than ours, because we are heading into a recession, is to ignore the facts. While some of the euro countries have had strong economies, others have been weaker than ours.

In the recent presidential election in France, the winner, Nicolas Sarkozy, campaigned on how to fix the pathetically weak French economy. The Germans worry as much about outsourcing as we do, and their unions are afraid they will be forced to give up some of their lush benefits to help the growth rate.

The other reason given by Mr. Zandi, that our mortgage market is messed up, was absurd. The dollar dropped years before there was any hint of the problems in the subprime mortgage market. It is a stretch of the imagination to think that currency traders knew that our real estate market would falter in 2004 and 2005, when home prices were still going up.

What's more, many countries have seen declining real estate prices, not just the United States. As far as the subprime blowup is

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Workers need to review benefit plans carefully

'Open enrollment' period a good time to start

By EILEEN ALT POWELL
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — As the "open enrollment" season begins at most companies, workers need to re-evaluate their health insurance plans and other benefit offerings to determine which best satisfy their needs.

But studies indicate that many people allot a half-hour or less to the task, and then simply renew last year's selections without weighing the changes in their benefits or in their lives, according to Bill Mullaney, president of MetLife Inc.'s institutional business.

That's a problem because employees are being asked to take more responsibility for selecting — and funding — their benefit programs at a time the costs for many of them are going up, he said.

One of the most expensive benefit categories is health care, and costs are expected to rise nearly 9 percent next year, according to Hewitt Associates, a global human resources company based in Lincolnshire, Ill. As a result, the average employee can expect to pay about \$330 more in health care costs in the coming year, or about \$3,600 in premiums and out-of-pocket costs.

Tom Billet, a senior consultant with Watson Wyatt Worldwide Inc., a human resources consulting firm headquartered in Arlington, Va., said it's important for workers to educate themselves about their options during open enrollment "because making the right choices can lead to savings of thousands of dollars, while making the wrong ones can

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Tips for selecting benefit programs

Some things to consider when evaluating benefit options during open enrollment, according to Tom Billet, a senior consultant with Watson Wyatt Worldwide Inc.

- When looking at health plans, weigh the premiums as well as deductibles and coinsurance costs.
- With life and disability insurance, determine what the company makes available and consider "buying up" if you want or need more coverage.
- A growing number of companies offer "voluntary" benefits, such as homeowners' or auto insurance. While workers pay the full premium, they can benefit from group discounts.
- Flexible spending accounts allow workers to set aside pretax money to cover medical expenses and dependent care costs.
- With 401(k) and other retirement plans, workers should make sure they're contributing at least enough to get the company match, he said.

All work and no play? No way

Human directionals do more than stand on corners



Brad Zweerink/Daily Republic

Round Table Pizza employee Scott Doyle waves a sign advertising the restaurant's lunch buffet on North Texas Street and Dickson Hill Road.

By INES BEBEA
DAILY REPUBLIC

FAIRFIELD — On his first visit to California, Scott Doyle was planning to stay just long enough to help his daughter and son-in-law relocate to Travis Air Force Base.

But the 44-year-old native of Memphis, Tenn., became enchanted by the California

as he took the necessary steps to acquire his state license. With the same enthusiasm he has shown for life in California, Doyle has turned one of his duties for the Round Table Pizza restaurant on North Texas Street into an adventure.

Every day from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. for the past six weeks, Doyle has turned the corner of North Texas Street and Dickson Hill Road into his playground. As a human directional, Doyle jumps, dances, wiggles, shakes and shimmies to grab the attention of drivers during lunch

sunshine, the scenery and the prospect of one day running into a Hollywood movie star.

So he decided to stay. To make ends meet, the electrician searched for temporary work

time. His task is pretty simple: Let people know about the lunch specials and the restaurant.

Hiring human directionals to stand on

street corners with signs is not a new marketing campaign by retailers or developers, but an energetic person on the corner can make it a winning formula.

With his water bottle resting at the base of the street light, Doyle is ready to weather the noon sun for as long as it takes.

"People do notice me and they honk and wave and even ask where the restaurant is," Doyle said. "I don't really dance to any particular tune, I just move to whatever is in my head. It's a great workout for me because I move constantly."

"On the days that I forget my arthritis medication I hurt a little bit, but it's fun. I like to do my magic on the corner."

Doyle admits that this was not the work he envisioned when he moved to Fairfield, but the restaurant was the first employer to offer

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Survey: Arthritis limiting people's ability to work

By DANIEL YEE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ATLANTA — About a third of U.S. adults with arthritis say the chronic condition — the nation's leading cause of disability — has limited their ability to work, the government said this week.

A survey released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 33 percent of U.S. work-

ers with arthritis suffered work limitations in 2003, the latest data available.

In Kentucky, slightly more than half of arthritis sufferers reported work limitations. Nevada had the lowest percentage, with about a fourth of its adults saying their work was limited.

"What was surprising about this was just how high and how strong

an impact arthritis does have on work," said Kristina Theis of the CDC. The study is the first to provide a state-by-state breakdown on the impact of arthritis in the workplace.

"It's not just an aging problem, but it's a problem that hits people of all ages and adults. It changes people's lives dramatically and for decades," said Dr. Steven Abram-

son, director of rheumatology of New York University Hospital for Joint Diseases, who was not involved in the study.

Arthritis comprises over 100 different conditions, affecting an estimated 46 million Americans. The most common forms are osteoarthritis — affecting mostly older people — gout and rheumatoid

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