The Herald Journal

Vol. 96 No. 68 Wednesday, March 9, 2005 Bridgerland's Daily Newspaper Logan, Utah © 2005 $.50

WEDNESDAY

ROBOTS SNIFF OUT DANGER
USU project wins award, may save lives —C1

Air advisory

Cache Valley residents are advised to cut their driving in half, stop burning and avoid outdoor activity.

Weather

Watch out for falling icicles
— Page A10

Update

Archeology

King Tut was not murdered, forensics show

CAIRO, Egypt (AP) — King Tut

New councilman chosen

County Council picks Gordon Zilles to fill Paul Cook's position

By Adam Benson
staff writer

After launching an unsuccessful bid for a seat on the Cache County Council two years ago, College Young-Ward's Gordon Zilles knew what it felt like to lose.

Now, he knows what it's like to win.

Cache County councilmembers decided on Zilles Tuesday night as the replacement for outgoing member Paul Cook.

Zilles, 49, told the council his biggest concern was balancing future growth in the county with the preservation of open space and agricultural land.

"I'm not against development, but I want to be a farmer for a long time," he said.

The dairy farmer also said he's well prepared to serve his constituents in the unincorporated areas of the county.

"The perception among people ... is that they don't have any representation, and I know you're (the council) very conscious that that's a concern," Zilles said. "It's always been my feeling that I want to be involved and try to stick up for the little guy."

Zilles

Zilles will fill the two remaining years left in Cook's term.

Cook, 37, announced his March 1 resignation in January after accepting a position as assistant vice president and director of technology for Panhandle State Bank in Sandpoint, Idaho.

Zilles made it through to Tuesday

See CHOSEN on A10

Few attend forum on tuition; officials credit smaller hike

By Rashae Ophus
staff writer

Despite a projected 9.65 tuition increase for the upcoming academic year at Utah State, a public forum on the issue Tuesday attracted few people with even fewer ques-

THE PRUDENT TECHNOPHILE

IM here to stay, for good reasons

By Matthew Syme

I'm a devoted advocate for instant messaging (IM). I've already written a few columns on this subject over the years and I'm more convinced than ever that instant messaging, even in its simplest written form, is here to stay. And when I say here, I mean everywhere — in the office, at home and on the go.

What makes instant messaging so successful? I believe it's the dual active/passive nature of an IM conversation that lends itself so well to our multitasking lifestyle. For better or worse, we're always trying to pack more stuff, interaction and work into our busy days and IM allows us to stay in contact with others during little snippets of time that we can control.

Furthermore IM provides instant action in the way we can immediately pose a question to an on-line buddy and get a conversation rolling, so to speak, without playing voice-mail tag or waiting around for an e-mail reply that may come a day late and few points short of a good answer.

And at the same time, it's at our leisure to respond to an instant message. Regular IM users fully understand that a buddy's failure to respond immediately to an IM means nothing more than "I'm a bit occupied at the moment, but as soon as I have two shakes, I'll chat back." After all, if something's really urgent, we can always resort to the old standby forms of communication and give them a call or simply walk down the hall and speak face-to-face.

IM inhabits an increasingly functional tier of conversation, especially in the workplace. Responsible IM users respect each others' time by instant messaging lower priority requests and questions. Personally, I'd just as soon receive mundane questions or information via IM than be interrupted by a phone call or office visit that requires my full attention. Similarly, responding to e-mail has become such a chore with its obligatory greetings, signatures and professional writing etiquette expectations, I dread the morning session spent filtering and responding to e-mail.

For me, swiftly plowing through an issue or point of clarification over IM by using abbreviations and emoticons often offers the most efficient and friendly method of written communication.

The only major drawback to IM remains the compatibility issue among the three or four major service providers. They have yet to even seriously approach the table to discuss a common protocol that would

Meegan M. Reid/Herald Journal

Dr. YangQuan Chen explains the working of the TOMAS-net: Task-Oriented Mobile Actuator/Sensor Networks at USU on Tuesday.

USU robotics team wins prize

By Lynze Wardle
staff writer

A team of Utah State University researchers received second place in a national technology contest at the University of California-Berkeley last month for creating robots that can "talk," "smell" and may be able to save lives.

Students Pengyu Chen, 30, Anisha Arora, 24, Zhong Wang, 29, and Zhen Song, 30, joined engineering professor YangQuan Chen to create what they call a "mobile actuator sensor network": robots that search out pollutants humans can't detect.

"What if you have something you cannot see or smell, but it's toxic and very dangerous? How do you know where the boundary is? You don't want to send a team of people, you want to send a team of robots," Chen said.

The prototypes resemble small remote control cars with attached computer boards.

Some are equipped with sensors that allow them to measure toxin levels and communicate with each other, while others release neutralizing agents into the air, keeping humans away from danger.

"Some of the robots do 'sniffing' and some do spraying, so you could eliminate the toxin 100 percent," Chen said. "They control something very hard to control."

The robots could be used to detect the boundaries of a radiation field at a radiation site, find and detoxify chemicals poured into a lake or reservoir or be strapped to aircraft to find and diffuse airborne contaminants.

Chen said that someday, the robots may even find a place in Cache Valley.

"Imagine every LTD bus is (equipped with) a moving sensor to test the inversion and the air quality. They would move regularly, and could collect data everyday," Chen said, adding that he would tackle the job, with the mayor's ok.

For their research, the team was awarded $2,000 and a $500 travel allowance by the Crossbow Smart Dust Challenge, a nation-wide contest sponsored by Crossbow, a supplier of wireless sensor networks. Chen said Utah State was the only university recognized, beating entries by Caltech and UCLA.

The annual competition highlighted the use of "Smart Dust" technology: mobile, inexpensive wireless sensors that can identify elements in their environment and organize themselves in groups.

Construction of the sensor network took place over the last three years, Chen said, and was conducted through the university's Center for Self-Organizing and Intelligent Systems.

The facility, which was organized in 1992, has conducted more than 35 projects, one of which is currently aiding soldiers in the Middle East.

That particular robot is small and flat "like a bathroom scale," Chen said.

Three omni-directional wheels allow it to patrol parking lots, recognize license places, detect chemicals and biological agents and search under vehicles, while soldiers stay out of the way. The team has also developed what they call a "mother ship" for the robot: a fuel-powered vehicle resembling an ATV that could carry the smaller robot into a danger zone.

"We think there is a huge market for these, at police stations and in the war," Chen said. "If someone reports something suspicious in a car, do you want to send a guy with a mirror on a stick?"

The sensor system is probably a few years away from being ready for sale, but in the meantime, Chen said he'll be busy improving his work. "The next step is to make them more intelligent and more autonomous, meaning you won't have any human intervention. It's a very exciting idea."

Meegan M. Reid/Herald Journal

They look like toys, but the Mas-net robots are ready for work that could be deadly to human beings.

Dress up your iPod with fun accessories

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The world's favorite digital hip-hugger, though prized by the music-porting crowd, often feels incomplete. That's why there are add-ons. Lots of them.

Some iPod accessories are about converting the shiny little brick from

puter stores.

If you want to take your iPod to a picnic and share the tunes with everyone, the iBoom ($150) will do the trick. Slip your iPod (full and mini) into this portable device from Netalog and it becomes a 20-watts-per-channel stereo boombox. The iBoom includes an FM radio with

> "The iPod phenomenon has since its inception been as much about

Even the new diminutive iPod Shuffle can be gussied up, thanks to New Hampshire designer and Mac fanatic Liz Hitchcock. She has lent the small flash memory player a few bangles and baubles to make it a wearable-about-the-neck fashion accessory.

Hitchcock's iPod Shuffle couture include little sheaths of purple