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CHICAGOLAND

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Former Sears co-workers Beth Cozza (from left) Traci Albrecht and Sandy Gramkowski say goodbye at a nearby pub Wednesday. Tribune photos by George Thompson

## Emotions high as layoffs wash over Sears

Retailer's tightly knit culture a thing of past as hundreds lose jobs

By Becky Yerak  
Tribune staff reporter

They have been coming to the Chicago Marriott Northwest in waves this week from their cubicles a mile down the road in Hoffman Estates.

Some drive cars, others arrive in a shuttle bus. Some are angry, others relieved. They all have one thing in common: They leave the hotel with a pink slip.

More than 500 workers—and perhaps 1,000 or more—are in the process of being told by

Sears Holdings Corp. that their services are no longer needed.

The mass layoff at the Hoffman Estates headquarters this week, where about 4,000 people worked as the week got under way, were not unexpected after the March merger of Sears, Roebuck and Co. and Kmart Holding Corp. formed Sears Holdings.

But to a company known for its tightly knit culture and top-shelf benefits that kept workers loyal to it for years, this cutback is a stark reminder that Sears' new owners don't much care about the past.

The culture going forward at Sears will be "cutthroat," said one administrative assistant who lost her job. Leaving the Marriott, she also noted that Wednesday was Administra-

tive Professionals Day.

Among the biggest complaints from fired workers this week: Severance checks that are less generous than ones in prior layoffs.

To industry analysts, the culture shift is not surprising: It's a sign of the pressure Sears and Kmart stores now face against the likes of Wal-Mart and other competitors.

Besides trying to fashion a leaner corporate structure, the company is trying to become more relevant by expanding away from shopping malls, putting its famed Kenmore and Craftsman brands in Kmart stores and determining which assets to sell.

While the swift changes are



Jeremy Dedic, who was manager of online promotions for Sears.com, says of being laid off: "I feel fine. . . . No grudges. It's a fact of business."

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## Hastert retreats on

Action opens way for DeLay inquiry

By Jill Zuckman  
Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The House voted overwhelmingly Wednesday night to toss out controversial rules governing its ethics committee as House Speaker Dennis Hastert gave in to public pressure to do so.

The change paved the way for the panel to consider possible ethics violations by House Majority Leader Tom DeLay.

"I'm willing to step back," Hastert (R-Ill.) told reporters as he left a closed-door meeting of the House Republican conference hours before the full House voted 406-20 to reinstate rules it

had employed in the last session of Congress.

Democrats had contended that Hastert in January had killed a more bipartisan approach and instead instituted Republican-crafted rules to protect DeLay, a Texas Republican, from having to answer questions about his foreign travel and fundraising activities.

Republicans had insisted that they were only trying to ensure fairness for all House members and prevent one political party from abusing the ethics process at the expense of the other by bringing frivolous charges against some representatives to embarrass them.

But with DeLay currently caught in a daily barrage of questions about his connections

PLEASE SEE ETHICS, BACK PAGE

## Justices' queries tilt to Andersen

File destruction may not have been illegal

By Jan Crawford Greenburg  
Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — In an intense hour of arguments Wednesday, a majority of Supreme Court justices appeared to agree that one-time accounting giant Andersen was wrongly convicted of violating a federal witness tampering law after employees destroyed tens of thousands of documents.

Questions by at least five of the justices appeared to support

arguments by an Andersen lawyer that the Chicago-based company was wrongly convicted for inducing employees to destroy documents in 2001.

The files were destroyed in the weeks before Andersen got a government subpoena for records in the accounting scandal at Enron Corp., the failed energy trading titan.

Justice Antonin Scalia called the government's interpretation of the federal law at issue "weird" and, in an incredulous voice, asked a Justice Department lawyer: "You want criminal liability to turn on that? You

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Images may be as famous and valuable as any fossil in museum's collection, including Sue



Conservators John Salhus (left) and Peter Schoenmann work on restoring a canvas artwork by Charles Knight. Tribune photo by Phil Velasquez

## Cleaning of Field's murals

By William Mullen  
Tribune staff reporter

Realizing that sunlight coming through gallery windows was damaging the Field Museum's renowned collection of dinosaur fossils, curators hit upon what was, for 1926, an extravagantly expensive solution.

They spent \$140,000 to commission the world's greatest painter of extinct, prehistoric animal life to create a series of huge murals of dinosaurs that would cover the exhibit hall windows and block the light.

Today, dinosaur cognoscenti say, the Field's 28 murals by New York artist Charles R. Knight may be as famous and valuable as any fossil in the museum's collection, including Sue the Tyrannosaurus rex, acquired for \$8.36 million in 1997.

From the time the paintings were hung in 1931, many of them have been recognizable around the world. Photos of them have been printed in science textbooks and periodicals, helping inspire some pa-

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## Government breakthrough in Iraq

By Liz Sly  
Tribune foreign correspondent

BAGHDAD—Iraq's political leaders agreed Wednesday on the composition of a new government, marking a significant step toward ending nearly three months of political bickering that has undermined much of the goodwill generated by Iraq's historic democratic election in

January.

Announcing the breakthrough, Prime Minister-designate Ibrahim al-Jaafari said he would not reveal the names until the Cabinet is unveiled Thursday to the National Assembly, where it will have to be approved by a majority of the 275 legislators.

The long-awaited news was clouded by the assassination in

Baghdad of one of the delegates to the assembly, the first killing of a legislator since the election results were announced in February. Lamia Abed Khadouri al-Sakri, a representative of Ayad Allawi's alliance, was shot dead at her home in the Bigoon neighborhood by gunmen who knocked at her door and then opened fire.

Al-Jaafari said he presented

the names to Iraq's three-member presidency council for approval, considered a formality, before the announcement to the assembly. The presidency council comprises Iraq's president, Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani, and two vice presidents, a Shiite and a Sunni.

The assembly's endorsement

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IN METRO

## A case of mistaken identity



In Wednesday's paper, the Tribune ran a photo of a man on a bike and identified him as Joseph "the Clown" Lombardo. In fact, the man in the photo was Chicagoan Stanley Swieton, shown above at his home Wednesday. Read how the misidentification occurred. SECTION 2, PAGE 1

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Abortion consent bill clears House

Supporters say it's pro-family. Foes call it misguided. PAGE 14

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Two line hed on Audit story

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