



BRIAN VANDER BRUG, Los Angeles Times, says he is in danger, she said.

the horse

group to buy Urgent Envoy and has now spent more on private investigators trying to get the horse back than he paid for him in the first place. "It's not about abuse. It's about her wanting to have that horse all to herself," Haney said.

The caper comes at a time when the horse-racing industry is grappling with the appropriate role for medication and performance-enhancing drugs such as steroids. Last year, California became the first state to begin randomly testing horses to deter the use of banned substances such as the hormone erythropoietin.

Nevertheless, most in horse racing view it as a bit of a sideshow. Ruffa's methods are unorthodox, her ideas about training unusual. And Haney and his partners are not

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gers' current coverage of sleeping on six ounces of mercury that a man dropped onto a downtown L.A. subway platform, with one commuter finally alerting authorities about the spill more than 12 hours after it occurred.

Among those exposed to the mercury was a woman who lives in downtown Los Angeles; she got the mercury on her head, nose slippers minutes after the man dropped it, said Los Angeles County Sheriff's Det. Dorely Regalado.

Video from a camera in the Pershing Square station also shows several people poking down at the viscous fluid. At least two men can be seen stooping to touch it.

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority has come under harsh criticism for its handling of the Dec. 22 incident, in which a man in a sports jacket dropped the hazardous element on the platform — then used an MTA intercom to say "I spilled mercury."

For reasons the MTA is investigating, workers did not go to check out the report.

Roger Snoble, the MTA's chief executive officer, said in an interview Friday that a second person reported the spill that night but did not specify the substance to the operator. The information was passed on to a night supervisor, who alerted a cleanup crew.

But, again, no one came to examine the substance — to the dismay of Snoble. "If it was a soft drink spill, it still should not have been eight hours," he said.

It wasn't until 6:51 a.m. on Dec. 23 that sheriff's officials were informed. A Red Line commuter on his way home noticed the mercury in the subway. He reported it to deputies in the transit division, prompting the clean up and station evacuation process, Regalado said.

By the time deputies arrived eight minutes later, two MTA maintenance workers were trying to mop up the substance, apparently unaware of its potential toxicity, Regalado said.

The revelations raise new questions about why the MTA — which has boasted about its

they had not been viewed by the operators who took the spill reports, or the supervisors.

Starting Monday, MTA employees will be required to bring on

placards that say "Mercury, Do Not Touch."

Phantom parking on the Westside

Exasperated locals say restaurants eager to expand are lining up fictitious spaces on West 3rd Street to satisfy city requirements.

By MARTHA GROVES
Times Staff Writer

West 3rd Street's bustling foodie row might well be L.A.'s latest exemplar of too much of a good thing.

Aggrieved locals say restaurant owners who are eager to expand are lining up phantom parking spaces to satisfy city requirements, routinely claiming spots that belong to or have been leased by other eateries, print shops or clothing boutiques. The practice leaves customers and valet vigilantes, particularly on weekends, jockeying on crowded streets for an inadequate number of spaces.

City planners acknowledge the problem of "fictitious parking" but have no database to track which businesses are leasing which spaces.

"It's a giant shell game," said Danielle Elliott, a Realtor who lives just off 3rd Street and has complained to the city about the issue. "It's affecting our quality of life."

As exasperated drivers can attest, parking is at a premium in destination pockets throughout Los Angeles. Densely packed spots such as Westwood Village, Larchmont Boulevard, Melrose Avenue and Venice's Abbot Kinney Boulevard have more customers than parking spots to accommodate them.

In neighborhoods where fast-food joints and tattoo parlors prevail, having a stretch saturated with popular restaurants and customers might seem the best sort of problem. But residents near 3rd Street say they're fed up with the congestion.

West 3rd Street, once nondrum, now hums with patrons who frequent the 30-odd eateries that line the dozen blocks between the Grove shopping center and the Beverly Center. Inside, chefs are cooking up turkey meatloaf and butter beans. Outside, customers and valets are concocting a traffic nightmare.

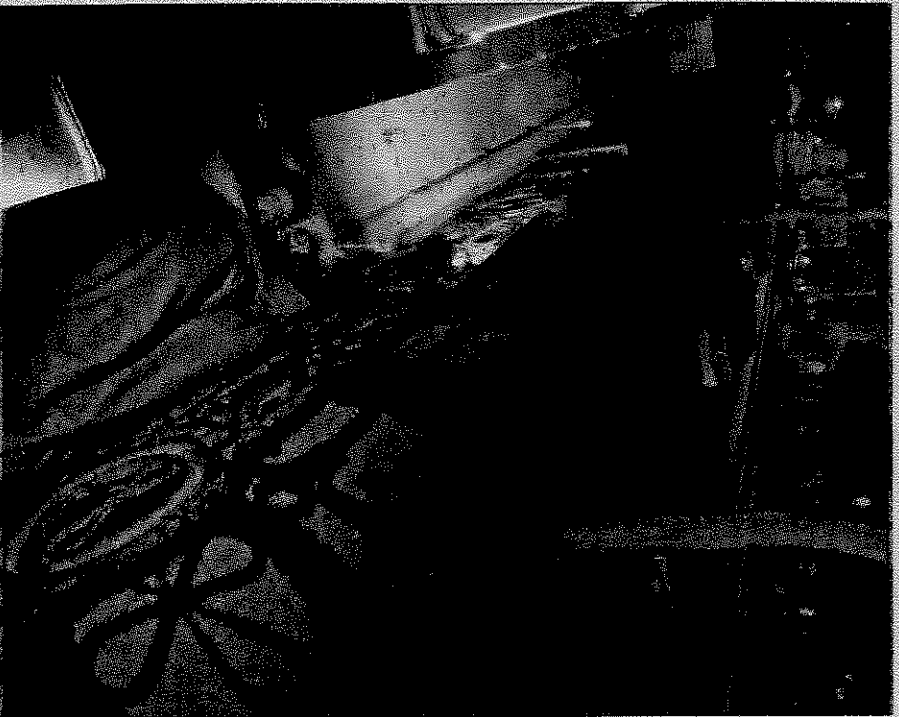
"The streets are jammed with cars," said Diana Plotkin, president of the Beverly Wilshire Homes Assn. "There's no place to park. It's an impossible situation."

Weekends are especially chaotic in the blocks between La Cienega Boulevard and Fairfax Avenue, residents say. Crowds line the curbs in front of restaurants such as Toast and Joans on

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GINA FERRAZZI, Los Angeles Times

COLD COMFORT: Johnny Martinez, 41, sleeps next to the wall of the First Congregational Church of Long Beach.

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