

## NewsLine

From Valley Press wire services

### Nissan recalls SUVs

DETROIT — Nissan is recalling more than 19,000 Nissan and Infiniti SUVs because a brake part can fail and make it harder for the driver to stop the car.

The recall affects Nissan Pathfinder and Infiniti JX SUVs from the 2013 model year.

The automaker says an iron brake caliper part wasn't made properly and can crack or fail. If that happens, the brake calipers can move and hit the wheel. That can reduce braking power and increase the risk of a crash.

The SUVs were made from Dec. 3 through Jan. 29.

Nissan will notify owners starting in May. Dealers will inspect the SUVs and replace the parts free of charge if needed.

### Activist investor discloses

NEW YORK — Activist investor Nelson Peltz has disclosed stakes in Mondelez and PepsiCo, following earlier reports that the billionaire could be pushing for a marriage between the sweet and salty snack giants.

In a statement early Friday, PepsiCo also disclosed that it has held meetings with Peltz's Triun Fund Management in recent weeks to consider its "ideas and initiatives" for long-term growth. A spokesman for Mondelez said the company doesn't comment on contact with specific shareholders.

Peltz's disclosures come at a sensitive time for the two U.S. food and drink makers. Mondelez, which makes Oreo cookies and Cadbury chocolates, has stumbled in its first quarters as an independent company after splitting from Kraft Foods.

PepsiCo, which makes Frito-Lay, Tropicana and Quaker Oats, is reviewing restructuring options for its underperforming North American beverage business, including a possible spinoff. If that were to happen, analysts have speculated that PepsiCo would want to buy another snack food maker to remain as big as it is today.

It could be that Peltz has no intention to agitate for a merger. But the New York native is known for building stakes in companies then forcing change.

### SeaWorld stock surges

NEW YORK — SeaWorld Entertainment Inc.'s stock surged Friday in its first day of trading on the New York Stock Exchange.

The owner of theme parks famous for water shows featuring killer whales and dolphins rose \$4.82, or 17.9%, to \$31.82 in late morning trading after rising as high as \$31.93 earlier.

SeaWorld, formerly Busch Entertainment Corp., announced in December that it was planning to go public.

The initial public offering of 26 million shares was priced at \$27 per share, which was at the high end of the expected range of \$24 to \$27 per share.

The IPO's size also increased from the 20 million shares that SeaWorld and its owner, private equity firm Blackstone Group LP, had hoped to sell.

### Carmakers woo Chinese

SHANGHAI — Ford, Fiat and other automakers that are competing for a share of China's huge but crowded market are showcasing their latest sedans, SUVs and sports cars at the country's biggest auto show.

Ford Motor Co. showed off its newest Mondeo sedan Saturday and a sport version of its smaller Focus aimed at China's coveted urban buyers. Italy's Fiat debuted a Viaggio sedan that it said was its first model created for China.

China's auto market is the world's biggest, and total sales rose 13% last year. But competition is intensifying as sales growth slows and global automakers that see China as a key part of their future spend heavily to create models for local tastes.

# Small firms undercut by rulebreakers

By JOYCE M. ROSENBERG  
 AP Business Writer

NEW YORK — She could save money, and there's a good chance she wouldn't get caught, but Consuelo Gomez says she won't hire people who aren't authorized to work in the U.S. to work for Marty K, her cleaning and landscaping business.

Gomez says she believes that she's being undercut by competitors that hire workers who are in the U.S. without permission from the government. When potential clients tell her that her competitors can do the same work for a lot less, it makes her suspicious.

"I'll hear, 'they're \$2,000 cheaper than you,' and I say, 'that's impossible,'" says Gomez, whose business is located in Bellevue, Wash. "I can't fathom how they do it because we would lose money."

If Gomez's hunch is correct, she's dealing with a little talked about problem that a lot of small business owners say makes survival difficult. Competing with companies that hire immigrants who aren't authorized to work in the U.S. is tough for a small business that follows the law because of the cost. Often, businesses pay ineligible workers less, and they also save on taxes.

Some 68% of business owners surveyed last month by the advocacy group Small Business Majority said too many companies gain an unfair advantage by hiring immigrants who aren't eligible to work in the U.S. In 2008, the Pew Research Hispanic Center estimated that 8.3 million people were working in the U.S. without permission. Current estimates put the total number of people in the U.S. with-



### CRUNCHING NUMBERS

Consuelo Gomez of the facilities management company Marty K looks at a computer screen in the company's offices in Bellevue, Wash. When space on the company's white boards is scarce in her small office, she sometimes uses the window to run the numbers of her small business.

Associated Press

out permission at about 11 million. The issue is in the forefront now as lawmakers propose ideas to reform the country's immigration laws.

"What small businesses want the most is a level playing field where they can compete fairly," says John Arensmeyer, CEO of Small Business Majority. "Unless we fix the immigration system, small businesses are going to continue to operate at

a disadvantage with companies that aren't following the law."

The use of ineligible workers divides small business owners. Many don't want to speak openly about whether or not they hire people who don't have permission to be in the U.S. Those who do hire ineligible workers don't want to say publicly that they're breaking the law, or that they benefit from

paying workers less.

"Our members have told us that while they follow the rules — committing time and resources to the hiring process — they remain frustrated with their competition when they cut corners and don't adhere to the same rules," said Kate Bonner, manager of House legislative affairs for the National Federation of Independent Business.

The number of businesses that hire ineligible workers is hard to pin down, although a study last year by the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta found that 1.6% of the 365,000 businesses it examined in Georgia had employees who weren't authorized to work in the U.S. It also showed that those employers had an advantage.

See RULES on C4

# Sit 'n Sleep knows about success

By LIANE M. ROTH  
 Valley Life Editor

You'd be hard pressed to find anyone living in Southern California who isn't familiar with Sit 'n Sleep CEO Larry Miller's advertising slogan "We'll Beat Any Competitor's Advertised Price Or Your Mattress is Free!" along with long-suffering accountant Irwin's plaintive tag line, "You're killing me, Larry!"

While Miller and the fictitious Irwin are the well-known faces of the company that comprises 30 stores operating in the southern half of the Golden State, including one in Palmdale, newly appointed president Nelson Bercier is no stranger to the methods that have made Sit 'n Sleep one of the largest mattress retailers in the United States.

"I started 29 years ago in sales in 1984, then became a store manager and then a general manager," Bercier said of his journey to the second-highest position within the business.

"In 1997, I had the opportunity to buy stock, and then I became a partner, senior vice president of sales and now president," he said.

Bercier succeeds Miller, who remains chairman of the board and CEO of Sit 'n Sleep.

Nelson grew up in Syracuse, New York, attended Boston University and in 1980 moved to California.

"Larry and I were friends personally," Bercier said. "I met Larry through my wife — my first wife and his first wife were sisters. He asked me if I wanted to give sales a try. He had one store, virtually just a mom-and-pop store."

Miller and his father Phil started that first Sit 'n Sleep store in Culver City in 1980, each bringing \$10,000 to the table and working around the clock to keep it going. The store primarily sold futons, following a visit Miller took to Japan in the late 1970s, where he discovered the Japanese-designed utilitarian sofa beds, sat on one and had that "ah-ha" moment, a vision of how futons could fit into the lifestyles of Americans at the time.

The functionality of a futon, a couch that converts into a bed with little effort, inspired the "sit and sleep" concept that led to the branding of the company, and as the futon craze took off, within a few short years Sit 'n Sleep became the first commercially successful mass distributors of futons on the West Coast.

"We probably sold four to five kinds of mattresses — they were not a major part of the business," Bercier said.

Sometime in the mid- to late 1980s, the futon fad started to fade, but by that time, big-name mattress firms such as Simmons and Sealy had discovered the small but influential mattress store, and things began to happen.

"They took an interest in us, so Larry started to develop and grow the mattress end around 1990-91," Bercier said.

By 1997, Sit 'n Sleep was a \$10 million company, he said, and during the last three decades it has grown to become one of the largest mattress retailers in the United States, selling more mattresses per store than any other retailer in the country.

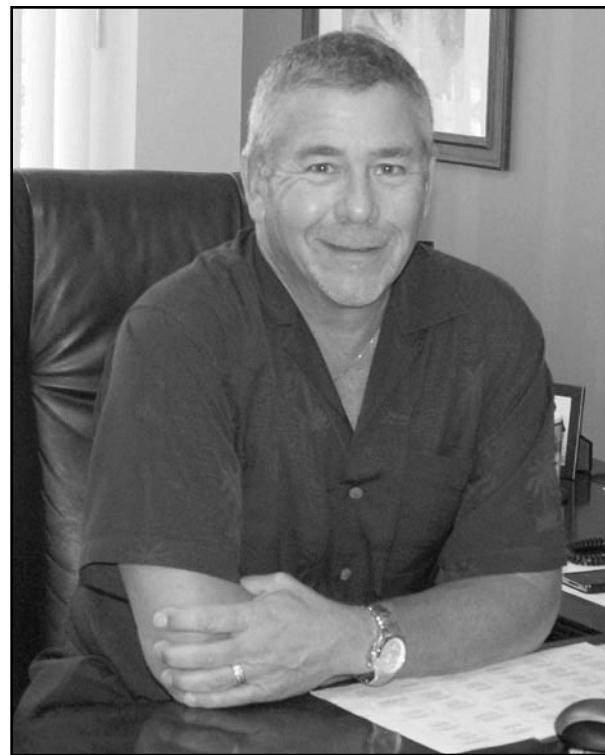
When the economy took a dive in 2008 and the housing industry collapsed, household goods-based businesses took a tremendous hit with the recession, Bercier said, and several long-time, well-known companies shut their doors forever. Sit 'n Sleep weathered the storm due to the acumen and vision of Miller, Bercier said.

"We had no debt — big plus — we expanded cautiously and conservatively when times were good. We had no debt. When the recession hit we reduced our inventory, not commissions. Larry and I made less money, but not our employees."

"No one left. If we don't have great people we won't survive. The recession was a learning experience," Bercier said.

The company also is involved in philanthropic causes, including partnering with Habitat for Humanity of Greater Los Angeles to provide mattresses, frames and box springs to every family that moves into a Habitat home in 2013.

As a supporter of Make-A-Wish



### HARD AT WORK

Sit 'n Sleep's newly appointed President Nelson Bercier sits at his desk. Bercier started with Sit 'n Sleep in sales in 1984 and has since worked his way up to the second-highest position with the company.

Contributed

Foundation of Greater Los Angeles, Sit 'n Sleep also helps grant more wishes for more children with annual mattress/bedding sales in which a percentage benefits the nonprofit organization that provides youngsters suffering from life-threatening illness with experiences of a lifetime.

With the economy picking up, Sit 'n Sleep has seen some of its biggest

growth since 1980, with three new stores opened last year and plans to open eight new locations in the coming year, Bercier said.

"It's the most exciting time for our company to see what's happening in the near future," he said.

"We're going to be here for awhile."

lrth@avpress.com

## Make transition back to work smooth

By MAX MESSMER  
 Scripps Howard News Service

COVER LETTER: "For six years, my life has revolved around my children. But it's now time to find a job. I'm up for whatever."

Re-entering the workforce after an extended absence? Whether you took time away to raise a family, pursue a degree or travel the globe, you have to convince employers

you're capable of making a successful career comeback.

Here are some tips:  
 ■ Highlight skills you've gained outside the office that can be applied to the workplace. Did you lead fundraising drives, serve as PTA president or volunteer in the classroom? These efforts show initiative and enthusiasm.  
 ■ Emphasize how you've stayed involved by volunteering with

a nonprofit, enrolling in online courses or attending industry events.

■ Create or update your LinkedIn profile and review your other social media accounts. Adjust your privacy settings so prospective employers see your professional accomplishments, not personal photos and conversations.

These job seekers didn't take the best approach:  
 "OBJECTIVE: I am a stay-at-home mom, but sometimes it's boring. So I want to work part-time to get out of the house."  
 Any other reason you're interested in a job with our company?  
 "EXPERIENCE: A total of 30 years. I can't list three decades of work experience on a resume, but I would be happy to discuss in an interview setting."

That's not quite how this process works.  
 "TECHNICAL SKILLS: I am not up on today's software. I know Microsoft Word 2000. OMG."  
 This isn't putting your best foot forward.

Harold M. "Max" Messmer Jr. is CEO of Robert Half International, a specialized staffing firm. Send examples to Resumania, c/o Robert Half International, 2884 Sand Hill Road, Suite 200, Menlo Park, CA 94025. Or, visit [www.resumania.com](http://www.resumania.com).

## Demographic Update

Estimated consumer spending on dried fruit	ZIP code	City	Spending
	93536	Lancaster	\$0.18
	93550	Palmdale	\$0.17
	93535	Lancaster	\$0.16
	93551	Palmdale	\$0.15
	93534	Lancaster	\$0.10
	93552	Palmdale	\$0.08
	93560	Rosamond	\$0.06
	93505	California City	\$0.03
	93543	Littlerock	\$0.03
	93510	Acton	\$0.02

by ZIP code 2011  
 \*in millions of dollars  
 Consumer spending on dried fruit in the Antelope Valley is estimated at \$1.124 million annually.  
 Source: 2012 Bureau of Labor Statistics, EASI, AdMall

## Debt collectors have the wrong person

By STEVE BUCCI  
 bankrate.com

### Dear Debt Adviser:

Collection agencies keep calling my home number asking for people who not only don't live here, but have never lived in my apartment. People show up demanding to see the person who owes money, but it is not me. I live in an apartment complex, and after months of harassment and convincing the agency that it has the wrong person, it simply sells the debt to another debt collector, and it starts all over again. The people the agency is looking for moved about five blocks away three years ago, and I gave the collection people their new address and telephone numbers. However, they still come here and harass me. How can I make this stop?

— Bob

Collection agencies keep calling my home number asking for people who not only don't live here, but have never lived in my apartment. People show up demanding to see the person who owes money, but it is not me. I live in an apartment complex, and after months of harassment and convincing the agency that it has the wrong person, it simply sells the debt to another debt collector, and it starts all over again. The people the agency is looking for moved about five blocks away three years ago, and I gave the collection people their new address and telephone numbers. However, they still come here and harass me. How can I make this stop?

### Dear Bob:

I feel your pain. Unfortunately, some collection agencies treat oral debt disputes, such as yours, as an immediate signal to sell the debt before it is formally disputed. By selling informally

disputed debts, collectors can skirt the legal obligations imposed by the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (FDCPA).

You see, once you formally dispute a debt, the act requires the collectors to cease collection efforts or validate the debt. For some sleazy collectors, selling disputed debts is their way to cease their own collection activities while recouping at least part of the price paid for such debts in a subsequent sale. To their way of thinking, it may be cheaper to sell a debt quickly than to take the time to validate it.

The net effect is what you are experiencing. The debt goes back into collections to a new agency without validation. This unintended consequence of the FDCPA creates a situation in which debts are sold and resold to the next collector, and this subjects you to an unending cycle of collection and dispute.

What you need to do to stop the harassment is to get everything you can in writing, keep good notes of the phone calls and

See COLLECTORS on C4

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 THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Every weekend in the Valley Press Business section: WALL STREET JOURNAL SUNDAY