



The Davidson team celebrates following its 74-70 victory over Georgetown in a second-round NCAA Midwest Regional game Sunday.

PDQ
Free stuff for kids
to do on spring break

BUSINESS
A taxing problem for
your work cell phone

EASTER
Celebrations here and
around the world. A7

THE PLAIN DEALER

BREAKING NEWS: CLEVELAND.COM ***** 42¢ HOME DELIVERY | 50¢ NEWSSTAND

MONDAY, MARCH 24, 2008

IRAQ WAR U.S. death toll hits 4,000

A roadside bomb kills four U.S. soldiers in Baghdad, raising the overall American death toll to at least 4,000, a grim milestone as the war enters its sixth year. Details, A6

NEWS MINUTE

TERRY PLUTO Indians' Carmona looks sharp

In the Central Division battle between the Tigers and the Indians, pitcher Fausto Carmona may be the difference maker. Details, C1

METRO



Girl's wounds are still healing

Checking up on Georgia Rice, the 7-year-old Lorain girl who was attacked by a neighbor's dog last May. Details, B1

South Euclid man held in shooting

Police say the 27-year-old shot his father to death and critically wounded his mother. Details, B2



FORECAST, B8:
Pasty sunny
and cold.
High 36, low 26.



**BREAKING
NEWS ALL DAY**

MARCH MADNESS
How's your
bracket look?
See scores
and an updated
tournament
bracket.
cleveland.com/
marchmadness

INSIDE

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WHAT DO HOSPITAL CHARGES AND ACTUAL HOSPITAL COSTS HAVE IN COMMON? NOT MUCH OF ANYTHING.

JOAN MAZZOLINI
Plain Dealer Reporter

For years, Ohio has forced hospitals to report what they charge for heart surgery, knee replacements and other procedures, to help you price-shop when you have the need.

But it's of little benefit to Ohioans because the numbers provided by hospitals have almost no relation to what insurance companies pay.

Medicare, insurers and private businesses, though, are moving to fill the void by giving consumers meaningful price information on typical medical treatments.

The problem with the charges that are now reported to the state is that virtually no one pays them, except for some uninsured patients — if they can afford to. So while the state posts hospital charges, they're essentially meaningless.

Here's an example. Cuyahoga County hospitals' average charge for performing a DRG 544 — the code for common hip, knee or ankle replacement — ranges from more than \$25,000 to almost \$47,000.

But Medicare usually pays local hospitals — and everyone in between — about \$9,000 to \$12,000 for a DRG 544.

Doctors' fees aren't included in either figure.

And if you're privately insured, the Aetna, Anthem, Medical Mutuals and United Health Care of this world have all worked out their own discounted rates that are well below the listed charges and may not be too far from what Medicare pays.

More than 30 states, including Ohio, require hospitals to report some kind of charge data, and much of it is posted online.

The information is touted as a way to empower patients — who are picking up more of their medical costs each year — to make informed decisions, and help those with high deductibles use the information to save money.

But experts say much of it is meaningless because it does not reflect what the hospitals actually are paid.

SEE: HOSPITALS 1A2

"Charges are almost useless. They have almost nothing to do with costs. They are artificially high, and almost no one pays them."

J.J. Silvers, *professor of health systems management at Case Western Reserve University Weatherhead School of Management*

Millions in unbid contracts at Tri-C?

Heating firm's boss
is board member,
fund-raiser

JANEY OKOEN
Plain Dealer Reporter

Trustees of Cuyahoga Community College are expected to vote Thursday to give six years of unbid work to a company headed by a member of Tri-C's foundation board.

Brewer-Garrett Co., a Middleburg Heights-based heating, ventilation and air conditioning firm, already has a contract worth \$15 million to improve energy efficiency, along with a separate, preventive-maintenance contract through which it was paid nearly \$2 million last year alone.

Last week, the management committee of the Tri-C board voted to recommend extending the maintenance contract to 2015. The company will be paid \$1.8 million a year, or a maximum of \$20 million from 2013 to 2015, to monitor 4,000 pieces of equipment.

In the wake of questions from The Plain Dealer, however, the college also plans to strengthen oversight of Brewer-Garrett's work and to hire a consultant for \$165,000 to independently monitor the contract.

The proposed contract extension, on which the full board is to vote Thursday, includes a new clause that Tri-C can cancel the agreement at any time without notice.

Brewer-Garrett's president, Leo Joseph, was appointed to the foundation board — Tri-C's fundraising arm — in 2001. It was just a few months after his company won a \$12 million, 10-year contract to make the college's buildings more energy efficient and the maintenance contract, which has ranged from about \$3 million annually to last year's tally of almost \$2 million.

SEE: TRI-C 1A6

This March sets record as snowiest

JACQUELINE JOHNSON
Plain Dealer Reporter

It's official. Saturday's snowfall made this month the snowiest March on record, measuring in at 30.4 inches.

So far, that towers over our whopping 6.6 inches of white in December, 16.5 inches in January and 19.6 inches in February. It thumps the 2001 record — 26.7 inches — and trounces the 8.7 inches we normally see in March.

"This is the way it's been the last several years," said Will Kubisa, a National Weather Service meteorologist at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport. "It seems like it's had a really quiet start to winter, and it's picked up at the beginning of February and March."

Today's forecast doesn't predict snow, but Tuesday's does. Just a little. Lucky us.

Continental tests paperless boarding pass

Fliers show bar code sent to cell phone

MICHAEL SANGUINETTO
Plain Dealer Reporter

Paper airline boarding passes may go the way of videocassettes and phone booths if an experimental program by Continental Airlines that e-mails the information to a passenger's cell phone succeeds.

Instead of handing over a paper boarding pass, the passenger shows an e-mail on a cell phone.

The image is a two-dimensional bar code, which looks like a rectangle of TV-screen "snow," and contains the flight information.

The information is impossible to forge or copy, said Transportation Security Administration spokeswoman Andrea McCauley. Continental developed the system with the TSA to streamline boardings and increase security. The system is being tested at George Bush International Airport in Houston.

"The great thing about this technology is the convenience," McCauley said. "Security is an

added benefit." Unlike paper bar codes, the e-mailed ones have information that is scrambled, encrypted and can be read only by special scanners, McCauley said. It cannot be copied or manipulated without detection.

Travelers still will have to show identification. And if there's a problem with the cell phone, a flier will be able to get a backup boarding pass from the ticket counter.

Mary Clark, spokeswoman for Continental, said the e-mailed boarding pass is a logical step.

"It's not meant for every customer," she said. "But there are many people who prefer to use their cell phones, BlackBerry or other PDA device, so it seems like a good idea."

For now, the e-mails can be used only on direct flights in the continental United States.

Clark said Continental Airlines plans to introduce the paperless boarding passes at other airports if the Houston trial goes well.

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter: msanguin@plaindealer.com, 216-999-4890