

**Nation | World**

» **Sandusky trial:** A former foster child says he was threatened to keep quiet. **A3**

» **New doping charges:** Lance Armstrong, right, could be stripped of his Tour de France titles. **A3**



**Business**

» **Stanford faces hard time:** The convicted swindler could get up to 230 years at hearing. **D1**

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**City & State**

**Feds decline protection for Texas lizard**

The Obama administration's surprise turn cheers the West Texas oil patch, disappoints environmentalists. **B1**

» **Rice University skyspace:** The first light show of "Twilight Epiphany" begins at sunset. **B1**

» **Council's wish list:** Proposals include strip club fees, expanding terms and a plastic-bag ban. **B1**

**Sports**

» **Pitcher perfect:** Matt Cain throws the 22nd perfect game in major league history as the Giants beat the Astros 10-0. **C1**

» **Whitney Mercilus:** Texans' first-round draft pick is signed, and is getting used to the heat as he adds zest to practices. **C1**

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» **Wes Anderson:** The Houston native director talks about first loves and his new movie. **F18**



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Brett Coomer / Houston Chronicle  
**Raul Rodriguez, right, with attorney Bill Stradley, is found guilty of murder Wednesday in Kelly Danaher's shooting death.**

**Jury calls shooting of neighbor murder**

They reject claim Rodriguez 'stood his ground' in party confrontation

By Brian Rogers

Prosecutors described Raul Rodriguez as a miserable, angry "gun-hungry man" who is singularly responsible for a confrontation over a loud party

that led to the shooting death of Kelly Danaher.

Late Wednesday, jurors agreed, convicting the 47-year-old man of murder for Danaher's death, rejecting claims of self-defense in the 2010 shoot-

ing. Danaher's widow, Mindy Danaher, broke down in tears as she hugged prosecutors and a throng of supporters. "Y'all, we have an awesome group of family and friends here," she cried.

After the verdict, Rodriguez was taken into custody, leaving his wife and family crying in a

*Jury continues on A8*

**SPACEFLIGHT**

**S. Texas now tops list for SpaceX port**

By Eric Berger

SpaceX now appears to like the Lone Star State.

During a visit to his company's rocket testing facility in MacGregor on Wednesday, SpaceX founder Elon Musk said Brownsville is his preferred site for the construction of a new spaceport.

"Right now, Texas, the south coast of Texas, is the lead candidate," Musk said.

Texas is competing with Florida and Puerto Rico for a launch facility from which there would be as many as 12 rocket launches a year, according to the company.

Later on Wednesday, Musk met with Gov. Rick Perry to discuss the site.

"The governor talked with the company about what the state could do to encourage them to pick Texas as a place for its space-

*SpaceX continues on A9*

**MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY**



Melissa Phillip photos / Houston Chronicle

**Dr. Eugene Alford, a paraplegic, tests a robotic exoskeleton at the University of Houston under the watchful eyes of research team members Atilla Kilicarslan, left, Andrew Paek, and professor Jose Luis Contreras-Vidal, right.**

**CRIME**

**Holley arrested in burglary case**



By Mike Glenn, Cindy George and James Pinkerton

Chad Holley, a teenager at the center of a controversial police beating case, is again in the spotlight after his arrest on Wednesday in a home burglary in northwest Harris County.

Sheriff's deputies arrested Holley, 18, after a burglary was reported about 2 p.m. in the 14900 block of Forest Trail. Holley and three others were near the home when deputies arrived. Items taken from the home were found in their car, said sheriff's deputy Thomas Gilliland.

*Holley continues on A9*

**Chad Holley was the focus of a controversial police beating case.**

**Chron.com**  
» See video of Holley and reaction from community activist Quanel X.

**Innovation makes strides in UH lab**

Robot exoskeleton project promises possibilities for those who can't walk

By Jeannie Kever

With a mechanical wheeze, Eugene Alford has stepped into the future, a mix of science fiction and high-tech research that promises a freedom once unimaginable for the millions with spinal cord injuries or other disabilities.

"I'm not going to sneak up on anybody," joked Alford, a plastic and reconstructive surgeon who was paralyzed 4½ years ago by a falling tree.

But his halting and noisy steps, made with a robotic exoskeleton

**Chron.com | On the iPad**

» See more photos of the project online and with our iPad app.

in a project led by a University of Houston engineering professor, illustrate new possibilities opening up for people with disabilities.

"We have no shortage of dreams," said Jose Luis Contreras-Vidal, the professor, who came to UH from the University of Maryland last winter. "Just a few years ago, the bottleneck was technol-

*Robot continues on A8*



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**Weather**

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FROM THE COVER

# Jury to return for sentencing

Jury from page A1

corner of the courtroom. The jury will return Thursday for the punishment phase.

Rodriguez's attorneys had argued their client had a split-second to decide if he was going to shoot when he was charged by Danaher and others and "stood his ground."

"Everything has to be seen through Raul's eyes," Neal Davis said in closing arguments Wednesday. "If through his eyes, he believed he was in apparent danger, he was justified."

**Learned buzzwords**

Prosecutors said Rodriguez engineered a confrontation and was parroting buzzwords he learned in a concealed handgun licensing class like "I'm standing my ground," and "escalating the situation."

"Raul Rodriguez is a neighborhood bully who had a CHL, an arsenal of weapons and a knowledge of the law," said prosecutor Donna Logan. "He felt he had the ultimate control, the control to decide who lives and who dies."

She told jurors that "self-defense was never meant to protect the one who started the fight."

The most important evidence in the trial was a videotape Rodriguez made of the minutes before he shot Danaher, and two other men, who survived. Rodriguez and his family lived near Dana-



**Mindy Danaher, left, embraces a supporter after her husband's killer is convicted. "Y'all, we have an awesome group of family and friends here," she cried.**

her, an elementary school teacher, and his family in Huffman, a rural community in northeast Harris County. Rodriguez went to Danaher's party to demand they quiet down just after midnight on May 2, 2010.

**Cackling laugh**

Rodriguez videotaped his approach and the confrontation.

During the last seven minutes of the 22-minute video, Rodriguez can be heard telling the partygoers he wants them to turn down the noise, then that he is afraid the drunken group will hurt him.

The video goes to black seconds after several men, including Danaher, charge him. There is a

cackling laugh, then a gunshot and the camera falls.

Rodriguez's attorney said the laugh belonged to Ricky Johnson, whose blood alcohol level was estimated at .27, more than three times the legal limit of .08.

"The person responsible for this tragedy is Ricky Johnson," Davis said. "Ricky, with Kelly Danaher and others in tow, charged Raul Rodriguez and forced him to make a split-second decision."

Davis said Rodriguez, who was on the road in front of Danaher's driveway shining a flashlight into the party and getting the attention of the revelers, then backed away

from the group when they came out to talk to him.

"He's out there alone," Davis said. "There's nobody out there backing him up."

Prosecutor Kelli Johnson sneered at the argument and said Rodriguez was an aggressive man whose pride was threatened. "He's out there to provoke them, to lure them," she said. "He's beckoning them out there."

The jury deliberated about five hours before reaching a verdict and will return Thursday to state District Judge David Mendoza's court.

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WEAPONS LAW

# Use of force should be the last resort, gun instructors say

By Mayra Cruz

Raul Rodriguez, who shot to death a neighbor at a 2010 party in northeast Harris County, has been called a neighborhood bully, someone who was familiar with the law — and carried a concealed handgun license.

CHLs, as they are commonly known in the state, have emerged this week as an issue in the ongoing murder trial against Rodriguez. The 47-year-old man, who was found guilty Wednesday, said he fatally shot Kelly Danaher in self-defense after feeling threatened when he confronted neighbors having a loud party.

Prosecutors said that during the confrontation Rodriguez repeated language he learned in a CHL class such as "I'm standing my ground," and "escalate" to bully his neighbors.

While the use of deadly force is permissible in Texas during threatening situations, Houston handgun instructors said avoiding having to shoot a gun is important to prevent unnecessary tragedy. Rodriguez is an example people should not follow, said concealed handgun instructor Gary Pierce.

After calling police, Rodriguez approached

Danaher's house with a flashlight, video camera and gun. Video evidence showed partygoers approached Rodriguez before he shot Danaher and two other men, who survived.

Pierce and other instructors agreed guns should be a last resort under any circumstance.

"What he did was totally wrong," Pierce said.

Handguns should only be used in situations where "your life is flashing before your eyes," said Pierce.

"He went there looking for a fight," Pierce said.

Marc Johnson, a handgun instructor, also said that verbal disputes did not justify the use of deadly force. He said his students are taught to keep guns away when confronting someone.

"If it goes south, it looks bad," he said.

Billy Newsom, a handgun instructor with AmStar System USA Inc., teaches students to avoid threatening situations.

Before using deadly force in a dispute, he said, all other choices needed to be exhausted, such as withdrawing or calling 911.

"The last option is to draw your weapon for self-defense," he said.

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# Robot-brain interface advancing

Robot from page A1

ogy. That is no longer the case."

For now, the exoskeleton is guided mostly by a joystick. But Contreras-Vidal and a small crew of assistants are mapping brainwaves in preparation for using them to guide the device.

Last week, Alford moved the exoskeleton — known as "Rex," for robotic exoskeleton as well as for its manufacturer, New Zealand-based Rex Bionics — by blinking after the brainwaves produced by his eyes was isolated and programmed into a laptop computer.

That illustrates how the device can work for people who have no use of their hands, Contreras-Vidal said. But he said the main thing setting his work apart from other experimental approaches is that it relies on an external brain-machine interface, rather than on electrodes implanted in the user's brain.

The idea of using robots to restore mobility drew attention last

month, when the journal Nature published a study that showed a paralyzed woman using a brain-computer interface to control a robotic arm to move a cup of coffee to her mouth. Implanted electrodes sent signals to a computer that translated them into operating orders for the robotic arm.

**Intangible benefits**

Contreras-Vidal envisions the user wearing a headset similar to Bluetooth wireless technology, an approach that he said will be less expensive and less invasive.

He predicts the interface will be ready to test later this summer. Clinical trials could begin at Methodist Hospital by early fall, said Dr. Robert Grossman, co-director of the Methodist Neurological Institute.

Grossman said the ability to power the exoskeleton with an external brain-machine interface would be a tremendous advance. But he said the trial, which could begin with 20 patients, will focus on the physical

benefits of standing and walking.

"Being upright, bearing some degree of weight, is good for the patient's own skeleton," said Grossman, also chief of neurosurgery at Methodist. "It's good for the patient's cardiovascular system. It's a form of physical therapy."

He said the trial will consider the impact on controlling blood pressure, the ability to breathe deeply and prevent skin ulcers, among other things.

But there are also intangible benefits. "Self-confidence," Grossman said. "Being the same height as people when you're talking with them."

Alford, who hopes to participate in the clinical trials, learned about the research from Grossman, who helped to recruit Contreras-Vidal.

Last week he was at Contreras-Vidal's Laboratory for Non-Invasive Brain Machine Interface Systems to try the exoskeleton, walking in a figure eight laid out in tape as undergraduates

worked on their own projects nearby.

It's not like being able-bodied, Alford said. "It's very slow. It's not practical for everyday use."

But it has intrinsic balance and doesn't require crutches or canes to steady the user.

"I got in and just took off," he said. And that, he admitted, was pretty cool.

**Closing on 'symphony'**

Contreras-Vidal grew interested in the mysteries of the brain when his mother had an aneurysm and spent a year in a coma after he earned an engineering degree from the Monterrey (Mexico) Institute of Technology.

"It was frustrating," he said. "We didn't know anything."

He later earned a Ph.D. in cognitive and neural systems from Boston University and, after studying neuroimaging techniques in Paris, his ideas began to take shape.

He describes the goal of a noninvasive brain-machine interface this way: The brain is a symphony, with various

**A wearable robot**

A research team at the University of Houston is working to create an interface that will allow the human brain to control a robotic exoskeleton that gives paralyzed users the ability to walk. The device is currently controlled by joystick.

**How it will work:**  
1. Sensors on skullcap read brain activity, which is transmitted to a computer



**2. The computer translates the brain activity and sends a signal to the exoskeleton, guiding the device without using the joystick**

**About the device:**

- **Developer:** Rex Bionics, of New Zealand
- **Cost:** \$150,000
- **Weight:** 84 pounds; newer model will be 64 pounds \*
- **Battery life:** 2 hours of continuous walking

\* User carries none of the weight  
Sources: Rex Bionics; University of Houston

User is supported by leg braces, straps and a harness

Jay Carr / Houston Chronicle

components — cognition, action, emotion — among the instruments. His research is based on filtering and amplifying the signal that powers leg movement.

"We're very close," he said.

The speed of future development depends on funding, he said. Most

of the research has been funded by UH and Methodist, and he is waiting to hear about a grant request submitted to the National Science Foundation.

"There are steps to get to the dream," he said. "Some are pedestrian, and some are a challenge."

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