

Dade residents still urged to use bottled water as tests continue, B-6



# Local & state

# B

## Conch rebels make lost cause profitable

By Robert A. Liff

SENTINEL MIAMI BUREAU

KEY WEST — War is hell, but someone has to do it.

One year after the ragtag troops of the newly proclaimed Conch Republic tried to take to the hills — only to discover there are no hills in the Florida Keys — peace has descended on the region.

"There's been no hostile action because they know we're out there in the mangrove and the flats," said Rick Dostal, who described himself as the commander of the Mud Flats Division of the Conch Republic Army.

Dostal, wearing a coconut-shell helmet complete with three small, dried starfish signifying his rank, cited security reasons in refusing to tell how many troops he commands but, "they know we're here."

Complete with the first Conch Republic Military Ball, a conch fritter-throwing contest, and more than 7,000 lovers of liberty, the Keys this weekend

celebrated that one brief, shining moment when they raised the blue-and-gold flag of their new republic for the first time.

The insurrection began when the U.S. Border Patrol erected a roadblock near Florida City looking for illegal aliens. They cut off the only road connecting the Keys to the Florida mainland.

For 12 hours last April 23, the Border Patrol stopped every car, resulting in a 19-mile backup, arrests of 23 aliens and confiscation of 150 pounds of marijuana.

One Border Patrol agent at the time conceded that the southern border of the United States had in effect been moved north of the Keys.

Indignant Conchs — as natives of Key West call themselves — decided that as long as they were being treated as foreigners in their homeland, they might as well go all the way and secede.

And if the establishment of the Conch Republic could garner a little national publicity for the tourism-dependent island, local businessmen were willing to provide flags, border passes, T-shirts,



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