

had been on paid administrative leave since March 6. Safety-Kleen launched an investigation into accounting irregularities in March after board members received information that the problems may have affected financial results since 1998.

## Wholesale prices fall

Prices paid to U.S. producers fell in April, breaking a two-month trend of strong gains. A drop in energy prices helped push down the producer price index by 0.3%, its biggest drop since February 1999. But analysts say the decline, which was expected, may not be enough to deter Federal Reserve policymakers from raising interest rates. Retail prices for April, considered a more crucial measure of inflation, are due out minutes before the start of Tuesday's Fed meeting.

## Cisco buys Swedish tech firm

Cisco Systems said it has purchased privately held Qeyton Systems, a Swedish developer of networking technology. Qeyton's products are designed to increase the ability of fiber networks to deliver phone, Internet and video traffic to metropolitan areas. Cisco will buy the company with \$800 million in stock. The acquisition marks Cisco's second purchase of a European optical networking company.

## Debt clock may stop ticking

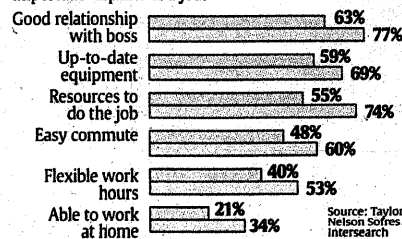
The National Debt Clock, for years a potent reminder of the nation's excesses, has run out of time. For more than a decade, the stark green sign has chronicled the second-to-second growth in the country's debt from its perch atop a building near Times Square. But these days, the numbers barely budge. The national debt has actually decreased since the beginning of the year, and the government is buying back some of its debt for the first time in 70 years. Barring an unexpected reversal in Washington's sense of fiscal responsibility, the National Debt Clock will go dark on Sept. 7, the birthday of the man who invented it, the late Manhattan developer Seymour Durst.

From staff and wire reports

## USA TODAY Snapshots®

### What makes a job OK

Things workers say are "extremely important" aspects of a job:



By Anne R. Carey and Bob Laird, USA TODAY

agency the past 22 years, wanted to make her central to 40th anniversary marketing efforts. Nostalgia-driven ads could've created strong empathy among the baby boomers who grew up with Little Debbie treats and now buy them for their kids, says Roland Rust, co-author of *Driving Customer Equity*. On a cost basis, it would have been highly effective. Little Debbie's annual ad budget is a paltry \$10 million. Tasty Baking, a predominately Northeastern regional player which markets the TastyKake brand, has the equivalent of just 30% of Little Debbie's sales but spends \$5 million on ads.

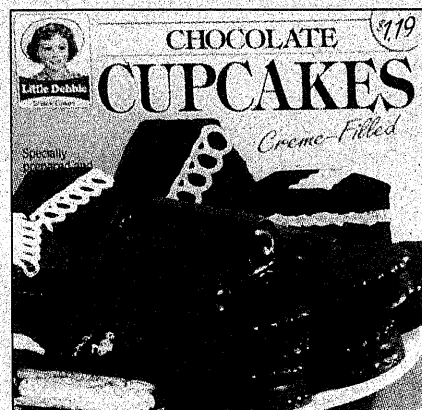
Tucked into the relative obscurity of their unassuming headquarters here in the southeast Tennessee hills, most McKee Food executives share Deborah McKee's reticence for the limelight. Muted promotions, such as Little Debbie dress-alike contests Sunday in 15 major markets, consumer vacation packages and anniversary snack cakes are the prime celebratory efforts.

Little Debbie's dad, company Chairman Ellsworth McKee, and Uncle Jack, McKee Foods' CEO, have long kept a low public profile. They're adamant about keeping things that way. Schmoozing about the business to outsiders holds as much appeal as a root canal, although the McKees agreed to

Please see COVER STORY next page ►



By Rick Owens for USA TODAY, above; and Tim Dillon, USA TODAY, below left



**Little Debbie turning 40:** Chairman Ellsworth McKee, above left, and CEO Jack McKee show off some Little Debbie products at a plant in Collegedale, Tenn. At left, chocolate is a common denominator of an assortment of treats.

# GM plans alternative to side air bags in '01 Saturns

By Jayne O'Donnell  
USA TODAY

General Motors plans to offer an inflatable side curtain in 2001 Saturn models that protects the head and neck better than regular side air bags and doesn't pose a risk to children. The move marks the first time the technology will be available in non-luxury cars.

The curtain will be phased into many other GM models over the next few years.

GM made the announcement as new reports show side air bags can pose risks to adults as well as children. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's latest injury data show that in 50 crashes involving side air bags, 18 people were injured by the bags.

Four adults suffered moderate injuries, including dislocated and broken collarbones, and one was seriously injured with three fractured ribs. The rest suffered minor injuries, such as sprains and bruises.

Side air bags also have caused minor injuries to a 3-year-old and a 15-year-old.

NHTSA and GM tests have shown bags could seriously injure unrestrained young children by flinging them across a car.

While it appears side air bags may have lessened some motorists' injuries in crashes, several people were seriously injured or killed in side crashes despite the presence of a side bag.

The reports don't include 32 people injured in 1997-99 Cadillac DeVilles when side air bags deployed without a crash. All of the injuries were minor, but NHTSA is investigating and could seek a recall of more than 300,000 vehicles.

Jim Khoury, GM car safety and restraints engineering manager, says it may take millions more vehicles with side air bags on the road before risks are clear. "Certain injuries will occur more frequently," he says. "Then the fluke things will become statistically insignificant."

Khoury says injuries to young children requiring hospitalization — including punctured lungs and lacerated spleens — could become more common as side air bags become standard equipment.

Still, side air bags deploy with less force than front bags and are less likely to play while people are up against them unless they are sleeping against the d

"The betting is we're not going to the same pattern of serious injuries from side air bags (as front air bags)," says an O'Neill, president of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

At least 92 children and 66 adults have been killed by front air bags since 1985. Thirty-eight more deaths, including children, are under investigation.

There are no federal standards governing the safety of side air bags. Automakers are expected to complete work this summer on voluntary tests that should assure the devices don't injure or kill children.

GM also says it plans to install front bags that deploy at two different speeds depending on the severity of a crash. 500,000 of its midsize family cars at beginning of 2001. The automaker also developing technology that could turn front or side air bags depending whether a child or adult is in the seat.