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H BIG SPRING HERALD

WEDNESDAY

DECEMBER 23, 2015



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VOLUME 111, NUMBER 371

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50 CENTS DAILY/\$1.25 SUNDAY

Vandalism charges filed against local man

Accused of causing thousands in damage during week-long spree



Torrence

One man is in custody and other arrests are expected in connection with a recent rash of vandalism which has resulted in thousands of dollars of damage over the course of the past several days.

Christian Anthony Torrence, 20, was arrested at his home in the 1400 block of Benton on criminal mischief charges, a Big Spring Police Department news release stated.

During the past week, city police and county deputies have received 47 reports of criminal mischief. 44 of which were inside the city limits and three were in the county.

"The offenses consisted of someone using a BB gun to shoot out windows of houses, buildings, vehicles, and even a church, causing over \$16,000 in damage," the news release stated.

Investigators with the Police Department and Sheriff's Office jointly began following leads which eventually led to Torrence's arrest, the news release stated.

Investigators expect more arrests to follow.

— Steve Reagan

Lighting up Christmas



File photo

More than 20,000 people are expected to visit the Comanche Trail Festival of Lights, which is open from 6 p.m. until 10 p.m. nightly through Dec. 31. Admission is free, although donations are accepted. Visitors are asked to enter the park through the Highway 87 entrance near Wal Mart.

Officials announce holiday closures

Many city and county offices will be closed for the next several days in observance of the Christmas holiday.

The City of Big Spring will close all non-emergency offices at 3 p.m. today. Those offices will remain closed until Monday, officials said.

The city/county landfill will be closed Thursday and Friday, but Emergency services will continue normal operations throughout the holidays, and the Emergency Utilities Department will remain open and can be contacted at 432-264-2392.

All Howard County non-emergency offices will close at noon today and remain closed until Monday.

— Steve Reagan

Jail death case highlights lax state police procedures

By **PAUL J. WEBER**
 Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — A Texas grand jury that declined to indict anyone over the jailhouse death of Sandra Bland could still charge the trooper who shouted "I will light you up!" during a traffic stop resulting in her arrest, a move that would focus attention on a state police force experts say has lagged behind widely accepted U.S. law enforcement practices to head off misconduct.

A grand jury on Monday decided that no felony crime was committed by sheriff's officers or jailers in the death of the 28-year-old Chicago-area black woman. Authorities say Bland hanged herself in jail with a plastic garbage bag three days after trooper Brian Encinia pulled her over for not signaling a lane change.

Encinia, who is white, has been on paid desk duty since the confrontation recorded on dashcam video heightened national concern about police treatment of African-Americans. Critics including Bland's family wondered why a routine traffic stop escalated into an altercation

that led to Encinia brandishing a stun gun and making the threat to light her up.

The stop also has invited scrutiny of the Texas Department of Public Safety that oversees state police. Records obtained by The Associated Press show at least six formal complaints have been found valid since the beginning of 2012 against members of the nearly 4,000-strong force for violating traffic stop procedures — the kind of incidents like the one involving Encinia and Bland. Two troopers received written reprimands, and the others received suspensions ranging from 1 to 30 days without pay.

But the department cannot put a number on informal accusations raised against troopers — such as rudeness or attitude — in which citizens don't sign their names to affidavits that trigger formal investigations. Law enforcement watchdogs said that is a glaring departure from most major U.S. police departments that keep tally of all citizen contacts, even for accusations that are con-

See **JAIL**, Page 3

Investigators seek cause of Sand Springs fire

The Big Spring Fire Marshal's office has not yet determined the cause of fire in the 100 block of Collins which destroyed home in Sand Springs.

"The fire is still under investigation," said Big Spring Fire Chief Creig Ferguson. "They have narrowed it down to a couple of causes."

On Friday, Howard County Volunteer Firefighters were called out to a structure fire around 8:20 a.m. According to Howard

See **FIRE**, Page 3



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Obituaries

Hershel Johnson



Hershel Johnson, 97, of Big Spring died Tuesday, Dec. 22, 2015 in Big Spring. Graveside services will be held at 10 a.m., Thursday, Dec. 24, 2015 at Trinity Memorial Park Peace Chapel with John Gustin officiating.

He was born May 18, 1918 to Myrtie "Mama" Donaldson Johnson and Leonard "Papa" Johnson in Arab, Ala. He came to West Texas in 1920 by train with his parents. In 1921 he rode the wagon train to Lincoln County, N.M., where the family homesteaded on the Block Ranch. In 1922 they returned to Big Spring. He married Oleta Gross on June 30, 1940 in Fairview Community. She preceded him in death on April 7, 2000.

Hershel served in Civilian Conservation Corps in Lamesa

and Golden, Colo. He also served in Army Air Corps in World War II beginning his career as an aircraft mechanic. He later worked at Webb Air Force Base and then Holloman Air Force Base in Alamogordo, N.M. He retired in 1975 and returned to Big Spring.

He is survived by two daughters, Carol Gustin and husband, John, of Big Spring and Sheron Lee of Wylie; one brother, Billy Fred Johnson of Oklahoma City; four grandchildren, Jamie Gustin and wife, Kerrie, Eric Gustin and wife, Annisa, Velvet Moore and husband, Danny, and Kelly Crosby and wife, Patty; four great-grandchildren, Trevor and Grace Gustin, Skyler Foster and Hershel Moore.

In addition to his wife and parents, he was preceded in death by three brothers, Royce, Lerla and Wayne Johnson; three sisters, Verna Mauldin, Jo Ann Johnson and an infant girl.

The family will be at the Gustin residence at 500 Wilderness Road on Wednesday evening.

Arrangements are by Myers & Smith Funeral Home. Pay your respects online at www.myersand-smith.com

Paid obituary

Marie Kirkham



Marie Kirkham, 71, died Monday, Dec. 21, 2015, at her San Angelo home. No services are planned.

Minnie Marie Graham was born Nov. 18, 1944, to Bessie Lee and Virgil Graham. She graduated from Sands High School and Draughon's Business College. She was married to Dean "Kirk" Kirkham for 51 years. Marie

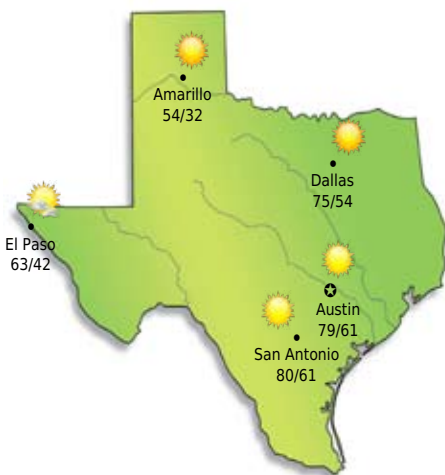
loved spending time with family, gardening and quilting.

In addition to her husband of San Angelo, she is survived by her children and their spouses, Kim and Karen Davis of Grand Prairie, and Kenneth Kirkham and Kyla and Cecil Willey, all of Big Spring; three sisters and a brother-in-law, Virgie Burchell of Big Spring, Joyce King of Blythville, Ark., and Brenda and Gary Riddle of San Angelo. She also has 8 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren.

Donations can be made to Hospice of San Angelo.

Local 5-Day Forecast				
Thu 12/24	Fri 12/25	Sat 12/26	Sun 12/27	Mon 12/28
69/40 Sunny. High 69F. Winds WSW at 10 to 15 mph.	70/53 Partly cloudy. Highs in the low 70s and lows in the low 50s.	60/26 Cloudy and windy. Highs in the low 60s and lows in the mid 20s.	32/21 Windy, periods of snow. Highs in the low 30s and lows in the low 20s.	38/16 Snow likely. Highs in the upper 30s and lows in the mid teens.
Sunrise: 7:44 AM Sunset: 5:47 PM	Sunrise: 7:45 AM Sunset: 5:47 PM	Sunrise: 7:45 AM Sunset: 5:48 PM	Sunrise: 7:45 AM Sunset: 5:48 PM	Sunrise: 7:46 AM Sunset: 5:49 PM

Texas at a Glance



Area Cities

City	Hi	Lo	Cond.	City	Hi	Lo	Cond.
Abilene	73	49	P Cloudy	Kingsville	83	60	Sunny
Amarillo	60	37	Sunny	Livingston	76	56	Iso T-Storms
Austin	79	54	Sunny	Longview	74	51	Cloudy
Beaumont	77	58	Sct T-Storms	Lubbock	66	37	Sunny/Wind
Brownsville	86	66	Cloudy	Lufkin	76	53	Iso T-Storms
Brownwood	76	44	Sunny	Midland	70	48	Sunny/Wind
Corpus Christi	80	61	P Cloudy	Raymondville	87	65	M Sunny
Coriscana	74	53	P Cloudy	Rosenberg	79	59	Cloudy
Dallas	73	51	P Cloudy	San Antonio	80	54	P Cloudy
Del Rio	81	48	Sunny	San Marcos	79	53	P Cloudy
El Paso	63	45	Cloudy	Sulphur Springs	72	51	Cloudy
Fort Stockton	71	46	Sunny	Sweetwater	72	49	Sunny
Gainesville	69	45	P Cloudy	Tyler	74	52	Cloudy
Greenville	72	50	P Cloudy	Weatherford	73	50	Sunny
Houston	80	59	Cloudy	Wichita Falls	70	46	Sunny

National Cities

City	Hi	Lo	Cond.	City	Hi	Lo	Cond.
Atlanta	70	65	Rain	Miami	83	75	M Cloudy
Boston	52	49	Cloudy	Minneapolis	36	24	Rain
Chicago	63	39	Foggy	New York	61	60	M Cloudy
Dallas	73	51	P Cloudy	Phoenix	65	51	Cloudy
Denver	40	16	P Cloudy	San Francisco	55	47	Cloudy
Houston	67	35	T-Storms	Seattle	44	38	Showers
Los Angeles	65	44	Cloudy	Saint Louis	67	39	T-Storms

Moon Phases



UV Index

Thu 12/24	Fri 12/25	Sat 12/26	Sun 12/27	Mon 12/28
3	3	1	1	3
Moderate	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate

The UV Index is measured on a 0 - 11 number scale, with a higher UV Index showing the need for greater skin protection.

Police blotter

The Big Spring Police Department reported the following activity:

- **AARON AUDRICK PENA**, 18, of 311 W. 5th St. was arrested on a charge of burglary of a habitation.
- **JAIME CUELLAR JR.**, 26, of 2522 Fairchild was arrested on a charge of possession of marijuana, more than 4 ounces but less than 5 pounds.
- **ISA RENE CUELLAR JR.**, 17, of 1003 E. 14th St. was arrested on charges of failure to appear, no driver's license and theft of property, more than \$100 but less than \$750.
- **CHRISTIAN ANTHONY TORRENCE**, 20, of 1404 S. Benton St. was arrested on a warrant for criminal mischief, more than \$2,500 but less than \$30,000.

• **MINOR ACCIDENT** was reported at the intersection of Gunter St. and Randolph.

• **THEFT** was reported in the 1100 block of Lloyd Ave, the 1800 block of S. Gregg St. and the 200 block of W. FM 700.

• **DOMESTIC DISTURBANCE** was reported in the 1500 block of E. Cherokee St.

• **CRIMINAL MISCHIEF** was reported in the 1300 block of E. 4th St. and the 3600 block of W. Highway 80.

• **BURGLARY OF A HABITATION** was reported in the 3600 block of W. Highway 80.

The Howard County Sheriff's Department reported the following activity:

Note - Officials with the Howard County Jail reported

having 54 inmates at the time of this report.

• **JAIME CUELLAR JR.**, 26, was booked by the BSPD on a charge of possession of marijuana, more than 4 ounces but less than 5 pounds.

• **AARON AUDRICK PENA**, 18, was booked by the BSPD on a charge of burglary of a habitation.

• **ISA RENE PENA**, 17, was booked by the BSPD on a charge of theft of property, more than \$100 but less than \$750; warrants for no driver's license and failure to appear.

• **CHRISTIAN ANTHONY TORRENCE**, 20, was booked by the HCSO on a warrant for criminal mischief, more than \$2,500 but less than \$30,000.

Support Groups

WEDNESDAY
• RSD (Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy) a chronic pain disease, a support and informative group, meets at 213 Circle. Call Lucy at (432) 517-9207 for more information.

• Alcoholics Anonymous, 615 Settles, noon to 1 p.m.; open 12 & 12 study meeting 8 p.m. to 9 p.m.

THURSDAY
• Alcoholics Anonymous, 615 Settles, open discussion noon to 1 p.m.; women's meeting; 6:30 until 7:30 p.m. Non-smoking closed discussion meeting, 8 p.m. until 9 p.m.

• Spring Tabernacle Ministries has a faith-based support group

for those who need help finding and continuing to walk down the path God has for each of us. Meetings are at 11 a.m. until noon and again at 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. The classes take place at Spring Tabernacle Ministries, located at 1209 Wright St.

• Weight Watchers meets at 6 p.m. at St. Paul Lutheran Church. Weigh-in is at 5:30 p.m. Weigh-in is confidential and you don't have to talk if you don't want to. Flexible payment options.

• Stepping Stone Group of Narcotics Anonymous meets at Spring Town Plaza (inside the mall, next to Attitudes Hair Salon, down by Bealls).

Open meeting at 7 p.m.

• A Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder support group meeting is at 6:30 p.m. at the VA Medical Center Veteran's Healing Center.

FRIDAY
• Stepping Stone Group of Narcotics Anonymous meets at Spring Town Plaza (inside the mall, next to Attitudes Hair Salon, down by Bealls). Open meeting at 7 p.m.

• AA open discussion meeting from noon until 1 p.m. at 605 Settles. Open Big Book study meeting, 8 p.m. until 9 p.m.

SATURDAY
• Alcoholics Anonymous open discussion meeting, 615 Settles,

noon to 1 p.m. Open podium/speakers meeting 8 p.m. until 9 p.m. Open birthday night, no smoking meeting the last Saturday of each month at 8 p.m. Covered dish supper at 7 p.m.

SUNDAY
• Alcoholics Anonymous closed meeting from 11 a.m. to noon at 615 Settles. Open meeting 7 p.m. until 8 p.m.

MONDAY
• Alcoholics Anonymous, As Bill Sees it, 615 Settles, 6:06 p.m. to 7 p.m.

• VA Alcoholics Anonymous support group, 7-8 p.m., Veterans Healing Center.

• Reformers

U n a n i m o u s
International is a faith-based addictions program helping people find freedom from addiction. Meetings begin at 7 p.m. Mondays at Trinity Baptist Church in Big Spring. Enter at the main entrance of the church.

• Stepping Stone Group of Narcotics Anonymous meets at Spring Town Plaza (inside the mall, next to Attitudes Hair Salon, down by Bealls). Open meeting at 7 p.m.

TUESDAY
• Big Spring and Snyder Parkinsons Support Group meeting at the Big Spring Senior Center at 10:30 a.m. the second Tuesday of the month.

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Take note

- The Big Spring Art Association meets every third Tuesday, September through May at 7 p.m. in the basement of the Howard County Library. Everyone is welcome to attend. Memberships are available. The annual dues are \$20.
- Howard College will be hosting several "update meetings" throughout Howard County for interested citizens to gather more facts and information about Howard College as they prepare for the tax rate rollback election to be held in January 2016. Those dates are: Tuesday, Jan. 5, 12:30 p.m. Hall Center for the Arts Auditorium, Howard College Campus, 1001 Birdwell Lane, (sign language interpretation provided); and Tuesday, Jan. 5, 6:30 p.m. Hall Center for the Arts Auditorium, Howard College Campus, 1001 Birdwell Lane.
- Home Hospice is in need of volunteers of all ages. The organization is requesting volunteers to sit with patients, make items for patients and help with office work. Volunteers set their own hours. For more information, contact Sherry Hodnett at 264-7911 or 432-213-0150.
- Mobile meals is in need of volunteer delivery drivers. If you donate one hour per week to help deliver meals to the elderly, call Kim Plew at 263-4016 or 213-7960.
- Crossroads Hospice needs volunteers for patient care. Contact Eva at 263-5300.
- Victim Services is a non-profit independent community-based program serving victims of all violent crime, including, but not limited to, assault, sexual assault and domestic violence. Victim Services advocates are available 24 hours of day, 365 days a year to provide crisis intervention or accompaniment to the hospital and law enforcement agencies as needed. If you can commit to 30-hour

- training, an interview process and a background check, we need you. For more information, call Linda Calvio at 432-263-3312.
- The Big Spring Symphony Board of Directors meets every first Tuesday at 5:30 p.m. at the symphony office, 808 Scurry Street.
- The Kiwanis Club of Big Spring meets at noon every Thursday in the Cactus Room at Howard College. Visitors are welcome.
- Howard County Community Health Center, 1300 South Gregg St., has certified application counselors who will help you apply and enroll in the Healthcare Marketplace during open enrollment. Please call 432-517-4557 to make an appointment to enroll in health coverage or renew/change last year's coverage. The certified application counselor will help you decide what coverage options best fit your needs, as well as what financial assistance you may qualify for.
- The largest fundraiser for the Hangar 25 Air Museum, the Silver Wings Ball will be held at the Hotel Settles, Jan. 23, 2016. Cocktail hour will begin at 6 p.m. and dinner will be served at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$50 per person and can be purchased from any board member.
To find out more information or to become a sponsor for the event, contact Hangar 25 Air Museum at 432-264-1999.

- this program please contact your child's school.
- An account has been set up at Western Bank (account number 1017623) for Blatyn Gusman and Zachary Duncan, who were seriously injured in an accident.
- The mission of CASA of West Texas is to promote and support quality volunteers who speak for the best interest of abused and neglected children in court in an effort to find each child a safe, nurturing and permanent home. We need your help. If you're interested in volunteering, contact Sara Basaldua at 1-877-316-8346 or visit www.BecomeaCASA.org or www.casawtx.org.
- Order of the Eastern Star Big Spring Chapter 67 meets the third Tuesday of each month at 219 Main St. Dinner begins at 6:30 p.m. Lodge meeting begins at 7:30 p.m. Everyone is welcome. For more information, contact Jimmy Ruth at 271-2176.



Courtesy photo

Cub Scouts from Big Spring Pack 305 participated in "Helping Hands for the Holidays" on Sunday December 20 at Walmart. The boys assisted approximately 150 Walmart patrons to push their carts and loaded their packages into their cars. For the scouts this was a tangible way for them to give back to the community and to say "Thank You" for the support that the community provides to scouting in Big Spring and Howard County.

FIRE

Continued from Page 1

County Volunteer Fire Chief Tommy Sullivan, who was among the first on the scene, the carport addition was fully engulfed, along with the

upper floor, and the fire was moving toward the residence. The home was a complete loss and the family also lost three dogs in the blaze. The couple had already left the home before the fire began, Sullivan said.

—Lyndel Moody

JAIL

Continued from Page 1

considered minor or quickly proven baseless upon reviewing patrol-car video. "It's almost shocking that they don't," said Jeff Noble, former deputy chief of the Irvine Police Department in California and now a prominent law enforcement consultant. "This is the state police of Texas. That's no small department."

Department policy allows such complaints to be handled at the local level, through supervisors, in what it calls "the informal resolution of citizen concerns."

"Sometimes those are

the ones you can see a pattern of an officer," said Liana Perez, director of operations at the National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement and a former police auditor in Arizona. "They may know how far they can go without it becoming a formal investigation against them. If you see a lot of complaints with rudeness or attitude, there is probably something that needs to be addressed."

As for more serious complaints about incompetence, telling the truth or other conduct "unbecoming" of an officer, the agency provided records of 76 complaints determined to be valid in 2013 and 2014.

But other records

provided to the AP by a person with access to them show a total of 204 complaints over that same time period, including 40 accusations that were determined valid but not disclosed because the punishment did not result in at least a one-day suspension. The list included troopers who were given written reprimands for use of non-deadly force, harassment and no probable cause for a search or arrest. Experts said this practice differs from most police departments, which do not limit disclosure to those of at least a one-day suspension.

DPS Director Steve McCraw defended the department's handling of complaints as serious

and rigorous. "We investigate all complaints," McCraw said. "I've had them drive the videos all the way up to my office when we've had complaints."

In October, the agency began using computer software designed to document trooper issues in real time and provides supervisors with automatic alerts when early intervention is needed. The program replaces one that had made it "hard to track on paper by hand," wrote Molly Cost, assistant general counsel of DPS in an October letter to the Texas attorney general's office. The old practices of paper documentation made "finding patterns in employee behavior

difficult to spot," according to the letter.

DPS spokesman Tom Vinger said the agency's new software will begin capturing "various citizen concerns" that don't rise to full complaints.

If cleared of criminal wrongdoing by the grand jury, Encinia would still face internal discipline. McCraw has acknowledged that En-

cinia violated routine practices for conduct during a traffic stop.

MYERS & SMITH FUNERAL HOME & CHAPEL

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Chester Pulliam, 57, died Wednesday. Funeral service will be at 10 a.m. Wednesday at Myers & Smith Chapel. Graveside services will be at 2 p.m. Wednesday at Prairiehaven Cemetery in Hobbs, New Mexico.

Hershel Johnson, 97, died Tuesday. Graveside services will be at 10 a.m. Thursday at Trinity Memorial Park Peace Chapel.

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Opinion

I column as I see 'em: Love, Jesus, and a well worn phrase

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

—FIRST AMENDMENT

Opinions expressed on this page are those of the writers and not those of the Big Spring Herald unless otherwise indicated.

ADDRESSES

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

• **BARACK OBAMA**
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The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

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• **RANDY NEUGEBAUER**
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• **KEL SELIGER**
State Senator
Texas 31st District
Phone: 432-268-9909

BIG SPRING CITY COUNCIL

• **LARRY MCLELLAN**,
MAYOR — Office: 267-2711.

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— Work: 264-2401.

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Home: 263-3771.

• **STEVE WAGGONER**
— Home: 267-8058.

• **RAUL BENAVIDES** —
Work: 267-2501.

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• **KATHRYN WISEMAN**,
COUNTY JUDGE — Office:
264-2202.

• **OSCAR GARCIA** —
Home: 264-0026.

• **CRAIG BAILEY** —
Office: 816-5270.

• **JIMMIE LONG** — 432-267-4224.

• **JOHN CLINE** —
Home: 263-7158.



EDDY PRINCE

I have been privileged to conduct many marriage ceremonies in my years of ministry and early on, I began requiring some degree of “premarital counseling” before actually performing the marriage, especially if the candidates for matrimonial bliss were young. If you happen to be familiar with a major sports networks advertising a few years back, you may remember some rather hilarious commercials involving certain people being “brutally honest” in their answers to certain questions.

I’m afraid the young couples I counsel probably think I originated those commercials because the best way to describe the sessions I conduct with young starry-eyed men and women would probably be considered both brutal and honest. Most especially when I deal with the matter of being in love.

Basically, I don’t hesitate to tell two youngsters planning to tie the matrimonial knot that I doubt seriously if they have a clue what love really is. They certainly know what butterflies in the tummy are, and I’m sure they know how to exchange poetic expressions of adoration, but I let them know that true love isn’t a matter of goose-bumps when they hold hands or stars exploding in their heads when their lips meet. And, it certainly doesn’t have anything to do with sexual intimacy.

Two normal humans, especially young people, can experience all of this and much more with absolutely no clue what true love is. None whatsoever. It happens all the time sans true love.

Of course, they all think I’m wrong because their love is “special” and they could write a book about being in love. Teenagers are the best at saying “I love you” and they know less about that awesome word than they can imagine. True love is an amazing and indescribable thing but it doesn’t live on emotions. It

is a priceless treasure that must be born and bred deep in the innermost part of the human soul, and it takes time to grow, being nurtured and fed on a continuing basis.

The greatest manual on love ever written is the Bible. What an incredible portrait of true love is painted on those pages! A more amazing display of true love could never be written into a movie script or in the words of a song. God’s love gift to all humankind, His Son Jesus, is unequivocally the most spectacular gift in history. And true love is what Christmas is really all about.

Father Larry Rice says, “Over the centuries, the celebration of Christmas has gathered so much extraneous material that it’s difficult for most of us to remember precisely what we’re celebrating. Take away Frosty the Snowman, Rudolph the red-nosed Reindeer, Santa Claus, and the elves. Put aside the Currier and Ives Christmas cards, Charles Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol”, and that little kid who wants the Red Ryder BB Gun. Let go of the gift-giving, the parties, the charities, and a White Christmas. Let’s even forget, for a moment, about our hopes for peace on Earth and good will toward all.

What’s left, and what remains the theological and spiritual core of Christmas, is the Incarnation. It’s the reality that God has taken on human flesh, been born as one of us, like us in all things except sin. We Christians believe that in Jesus Christ, the human and the divine are brought together, are simultaneous realities. It was part of God’s plan and purpose that He should experience life as we experience it— being born as a child, living and growing as a human child, knowing all our wonder and fear and joy.

In the coming of Jesus into the world, our human nature could be redeemed, and His divine nature could be concretely accessible to us. The world was changed by Jesus coming into it, giving birth to our hopes for salvation. Through His birth, His life, His teaching, and His death and resurrection, God Incarnate has made possible the

Peace on Earth we long for, and the love and reconciliation we still believe can reign.”

Whether you are a religious person or not you’re probably familiar with John 3:16. It says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Hear that? God loved. He gave. The same author said, “Greater love has no man than this: to lay down one’s life for his friends.” (John 15:13) Jesus came to live, die, and rise from the dead so we could all have God’s love gift of eternal life. Now, that’s what I call a Christmas present!

The real Christmas story is the reality of God Almighty becoming a human being in the Person of Jesus Christ. Why did God do such a thing? Because He loves us! Why was Christmas necessary? Because we needed a Savior! Why does God love us so much? Because He is love itself (1 John 4:8). Why do we celebrate Christmas each year? Out of gratitude for what God did for us. We remember His birth by giving each other gifts, worshipping Him, and being especially conscious of the poor and less fortunate.

The true meaning of Christmas is simply love, but not just carnal or earthly love. That can sometimes be shallow and insincere. God loved His own and provided a way, the only Way, for us to spend eternity with Him. He gave His Only Son to take our punishment for sins. He paid the price in full, and we are free from condemnation when we accept that free gift of love. “But God demonstrated His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

As we share gifts and all the traditional joyous expressions of the Christmas season with our families and friends, let’s keep Jesus and His love for us front and center in it all. Because, the well-worn phrase “Jesus in the reason for the season” is absolutely true. It’s all about true love.

You may not agree with anything I’ve said, but I column as I see ‘em.

HOW TO CONTACT US

The Herald is always interested in our readers’ opinions.

In order that we might better serve your needs, we offer several ways in which you may contact us:

- In person at 710 Scurry St.
- By telephone at 263-7331
- By fax at 264-7205
- By e-mail at editor@bigspringherald.com.
- By mail at P.O. Box 1431, Big Spring, 79721

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The Herald welcomes letters to the editor. We ask you to follow these guidelines:

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- We reserve the right to limit publication to one letter per 30-day period per author.
- Letters that are unsigned or do not include a telephone number or address will not be considered.
- Letters should be e-mailed to editor@bigspringherald.com or mailed to Editor, Big Spring Herald, P.O. Box 1431, Big Spring, 79721.

DAILY PRAYER

May we remain diligent about reading Your word, Lord, for our life.

Amen

Right-wingers and the Red Pope

Ah, ‘tis the season for family, friends, eggnog, chipmunks singing Christmas carols — and all-out, no-mercy, blow-’em-all-to-hell war.

Not war like in Afghanistan. No, no — this is the far right’s God-awful “War on Christmas.” In this season of Peace on Earth, a delusional faction of rightists has cooked up a hokey “cultural crisis” to rally their own followers by fomenting hatred of ... well, of whom? “Blasphemous-liberal-Democrat-atheist-humanists,” they shout!

The infidels are not accused of lobbing actual bombs in this “war,” but Words of Mass Destruction. Specifically, wail the purists, unholy left-wingers go around saying “happy holidays,” rather than “merry Christmas,” as Jesus taught us to say. Or was it Constantine the Great in the fourth century who came up with that?

Never mind, the rightists’ point is that diabolical lefties (i.e., Marxists) are out to ban Christmas entirely. Heroic defender of the faith Sarah Palin has even written a thin book about this devious plot, revealing that “happy holidays” is merely “the tip of the spear in a larger battle to ... make true religious freedom a thing of

America’s past.”

Luckily, note the Merry Christmas crusaders, there are such bright lights as Indiana State Sen. Jim Smith. Smith hopes to join Texas, Alabama, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Tennessee in the “Merry Christmas Club” — in pushing state laws to allow Christian icons and ceremonies into our schools. Then there’s U.S. Rep. Doug Lamborn from Colorado. He and 35 of his fellow Republican congress critters have proposed a House resolution to protect Christmas. “A creche in every public space,” is their cry, “a cross on every city hall.” To hell with Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, the winter solstice, etc.: This is war!

It’s also insulting that they would attempt to try to generate a major social conflict over the fiction that the phrase “happy holidays” constitutes religious discrimination, whine that they are a repressed minority and equate it with war. First: Jews, Muslims and others don’t get to brand public spaces as their religious property. Second: Nearly three-fourths of Americans are Christian, so drop the put-upon martyr pose. And third: War really is hell, with blood, life-long trauma and death, so stop pretending you’re in one.

But rationality doesn’t seem to be included in the liturgy of their political church. Indeed, some of its acolytes have added a twist on Christmas that would make Jesus weep. Indeed, they have launched a war against Jesus! How twisted is that? They

say no one should mess with the word “Christmas,” yet they’re messing with the guy Christmas is supposed to be about.

OK, technically they’re not going directly at Jesus but rather at a key part of his message and, in particular, a key messenger of Christianity: Pope Francis! They’ve decided that the Pope is a “Marxist,” pointing out that Francis speaks often about “the structural causes of poverty,” the “idolatry of money,” and the “new tyranny” of unfettered capitalism. Obviously, say the Pontiff’s pious critics, that’s commie talk.

The clincher for them was when Francis wrote an exhortation in which he asked in outrage: “How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points?” See, cried the carpers, that’s proof that Francis is the Red Pope!

But wait, that was a very good question he asked, one ripe with the moral wrath that Jesus himself frequently showed toward the callous rich and their “love of money.” In fact, the Pope’s words ring with the deep ethics you find in Jesus’ sermon on the mount and in his admonitions to serve the poor. Was he a commie, too?

To find out more about Jim Hightower, and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit www.creators.com.



JIM HIGHTOWER



*The Force
was strong
this year*

Courtesy photos/Walt Disney Co.

Star Wars named AP entertainer of the year

LOS ANGELES (AP) — “Star Wars” isn’t just strong. It’s unstoppable.

The revival of the nearly 40-year-old space saga has already dominated the box office and toy shelves. Now, it’s also been selected as The Associated Press Entertainer of the Year and is amassing support for Academy Awards consideration.

“Personally, it’s been three years of feeling privileged to be part of something that’s bigger than all of us,” filmmaker J.J. Abrams told the AP in an interview. “This accolade is very

much appreciated and no exception to that feeling.”

“Star Wars” won the AP’s annual Entertainer of the Year contest with a volley of votes from members that would rival the firepower of the First Order.

The sci-fi series bested Adele, Taylor Swift and Amy Schumer as the top vote getter. Others up for the honor included streaming services, Jon Stewart, Jennifer Lawrence, Taraji P. Henson, and the Kardashians.

“In a year full of sequels, reboots and returns, none have recap-

tured the zeitgeist like ‘Star Wars: The Force Awakens,’” wrote Nick Dutro of The Advertiser-Tribune in Tiffin, Ohio.

The initial impact of a “Star Wars” resurgence first began reverberating across the pop-culture landscape in 2012 when Disney acquired Lucasfilm for more than \$4 billion, plotting a pair of movie spin-offs and a new trilogy merging veterans Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill), Leia Organa (Carrie Fisher) and Han Solo (Harrison Ford) with newcomers Rey (Daisy Ridley), Finn (John Boyega) and Kyo-

lo Ren (Adam Driver).

In the year leading up to the December release of “The Force Awakens,” Disney and Lucasfilm unleashed a barrage of “Star Wars” merchandise, comic books and video games that fueled anticipation for the film.

When the movie opened in theaters, “The Force Awakens” lit up screens — and fans’ eyeballs — brighter than a lightsaber. With an astronomical \$248 million debut at the box office last weekend, the newest “Star Wars” entry trampled over the re-

cord for biggest debut in North America

“The Force Awakens” also has won over most critics, despite not being screened for them ahead of the film’s mammoth Dec. 14 premiere in Hollywood. The American Film Institute selected it as one of its 10 best movies of the year, and the Critics’ Choice Awards added it as an 11th best picture nominee, leading many to have faith in “The Force Awakens” as a viable Oscar contender.

“The ‘Star Wars’ franchise is holding an IOU that it could cash in this

year,” said Tom O’Neil, editor-in-chief of Gold Derby, a site that handicaps Hollywood awards and other events. “The Oscars owe major love to the ‘Star Wars’ franchise. It’s one of the most successful and beloved franchises in Hollywood history. It’s criminal that Oscar voters have never historically taken sci-fi seriously.”

While previous “Star Wars” films garnered 22 nominations and seven wins at the Academy Awards, only the original “Star Wars” earned a best picture nod.

“The Force Awakens” is already on the academy’s short list for a visual effects nomination with 9 other films, and O’Neil is hopeful that it will be among the best picture candidates when the Oscar nominations are announced Jan. 14. He also wouldn’t be shocked if Harrison Ford is recognized for reprising his role as Han Solo and composer John Williams earns his 50th nomination for the film’s score.

“It’s funny,” said Abrams. “I’ve spent the last few years with everyone asking me how I am dealing with the pressure. The truth is that anything that happens at this point is icing on a cake that I’m just happy came out of the oven.”



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News in brief

San Angelo police arrest 2 in August skateboarder death

SAN ANGELO, Texas (AP) — San Angelo police have arrested two suspects in the August hit-and-run death of a man riding a skateboard.

Police say 39-year-old Christopher Lee Mata and 40-year-old Nicole Lorelle Johnson, both of San Angelo, were arrested Tuesday night. They are charged with failure to stop and render aid in an accident involving death.

Authorities say 21-year-old Joe Carlos Lopez was struck and killed Aug. 2 while riding his skateboard on a San Angelo street.

Tom Green County online jail records show Johnson was being held Wednesday, with no immediate details on bond or an attorney to speak for her. Jail records did not immediately list custody or other information for Mata.

Police did not immediately release additional details on the investigation.

EPA approves plan to assess damage to cover at toxic site

HOUSTON (AP) — The Environmental Protection Agency said Tuesday that it approved a plan to assess damage to the stone cover of the protective cap for a structure at a southeastern Texas Superfund site that contains toxic waste from a paper mill.

The plan comes as the EPA and county officials disagree over whether the protective cap at the San Jacinto River Waste Pits Superfund site in Harris County suffered some sort of breach that could have allowed toxic dioxins to leak into surrounding water and sediment.

According to EPA spokesman David Gray, a layer of rocks over the pit cover has some damage.

"We do not have any indication that the protective cap itself has been breached," said Gray, who added that the review of the damaged area is set to begin on Wednesday and will include the collection of sediment samples to see if any toxic material was released.

But Rock Owens, manager of the environmental group of the Harris County Attorney's Office, said he was surprised the EPA was being tentative about indicating there was a hole in the stone cover or the protective cap.

"I suppose one could argue there may or may not be a hole, but they are proceeding as if there was a hole," Owens said. "I guess they are just trying to keep people from being panicky, which is understandable."

A team of divers looked at the protective cap earlier this month after Harris County had complained that the maintenance program for the cap had been insufficient, Owens said.

The waste pits were first constructed in 1965 next to the San Jacinto River and were used to store toxic waste from the paper mill. Over time, part of the pits sunk below the river, eroding part of the containment structure and releasing waste into the river. The EPA in 2008 deemed the waste pits a Superfund site, a designation used for the nation's most contaminated land. The protective cap was put in place in 2011.

Austin police officer won't be indicted in fatal shooting

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A Travis County jury has chosen not to indict a police officer who fatally shot a woman during a standoff in a North Austin apartment building in May.

The Austin American-Statesman reports that the grand jury reviewed evidence for about seven hours before members voted to not seek criminal

charges against Austin police SWAT team sniper Robert Pfaff.

Pfaff shot and killed 31-year-old Cassandra Bolin after her boyfriend called police, saying he received text messages from Bolin indicating she was suicidal.

Austin police tried to convince Bolin to leave the apartment for three hours, but she refused.

The district attorney's office says that after police fired a bean bag projectile at Bolin, she came out of the apartment with a handgun pointed at herself and then at police.

Pfaff shot Bolin three times, killing her.

Texan among those killed in suicide attack in Afghanistan

DALLAS (AP) — A 28-year-old U.S. airman from South Texas was among those killed in a suicide attack in Afghanistan.

The Department of Defense said Tuesday that Staff Sgt. Michael A. Cinco of Mercedes was one of six American service members killed when an attacker drove an explosives-laden motorcycle into their patrol Monday near Bagram Air Base.

Cinco was assigned to the Air Force Office of Special Investigations, 11th Field Investigations Squadron, Joint Base San Antonio-Randolph, Texas.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack. Monday was the deadliest day for American troops in Afghanistan since May 2013, when five were killed by a roadside bomb in the country's south and two killed by an Afghan soldier in an insider attack in the west.

Bryan police say 6-year-old dies after being hit by truck

BRYAN, Texas (AP) — Bryan police say a 6-year-old boy has died after being struck by a truck as he crossed the street on foot.

Police say the boy was taken to a hospital after being struck on Tuesday afternoon. He later died at the hospital.

Police say the driver of the truck has been cooperative.

Abbott gets mock nativity scene removed from Texas Capitol

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Gov. Greg Abbott has succeeded in getting a holiday display featuring some American Founding Fathers and the Bill of Rights in a manger removed from the Texas Capitol.

The "winter solstice" display was created by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, which promotes the separation of church and state.

It showed Benjamin Franklin, the Statue of Liberty, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington peering down at the Bill of Rights, and was approved for display by the State Preservation Board.

Christmas trees and other holiday decorations are displayed at the Capitol.

But the manger scene was removed Tuesday after Abbott called it a "juvenile parody" whose figures represented a "replacement for Jesus Christ."

Abbott recently urged Orange, Texas, to keep a traditional city hall nativity scene amid opponents'

threats of legal challenges.

Whale stranded in surf off Galveston dies, necropsy planned

GALVESTON, Texas (AP) — Marine experts say a 40-foot whale that was stranded in the surf off Galveston has died.

Officials with the Texas Marine Mammal Stranding Network spent several hours Tuesday monitoring the whale, as it thrashed in the water, but it died.

Network spokeswoman Heidi Whitehead says the whale apparently was very ill to get that close to shore before dying.

Officials had no immediate information on the species or how long the whale was in the surf before being discovered Tuesday morning, about 30 yards from shore.

Dozens of people had gathered on the beach watching efforts to try to save the struggling whale.

Two tractors were being positioned to put straps around the carcass and haul the body to shore. Whitehead says a necropsy would be performed Wednesday.

Oracle to build major Austin campus

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Software giant Oracle Corp. plans to build a new corporate campus in Austin, the company said Tuesday.

The company confirmed to the Austin American-Statesman plans to build the new campus, which will be on 27 acres overlooking Lady Bird Lake. The company said that with the new campus, Oracle plans to grow its Austin workforce by 50 percent over the next few years.

The move expands the presence of another rapidly growing California-based technology giant in Central Texas. Companies including Apple Inc., Google and Facebook are a ramping up their workforces in the area.

Jobs at the new campus will be primarily sales-oriented, including direct selling, lead qualification, prospecting and technical support.

"Austin was a natural choice for Oracle to invest and grow," said Scott Armour, senior vice president of Oracle Direct, the firm's cloud sales organization. "We already have a high-performing employee base in the region, and the surrounding technology community is teeming with creative and innovative thinkers. Our state-of-the-art campus will be designed to inspire, support and attract top talent — with a special focus on the needs of millennials."

Oracle declined to disclose the size of its current local workforce, but the company has substantial operations in Central Texas in sales, marketing and semiconductor design.

Oracle has between 1,000 and 2,000 employees here, according to the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce's website.

Founded in 1977 and headquartered in Redwood City, Calif., Oracle is one of the world's leading software companies.

It has more than 130,000 employees worldwide, according to securities filings.



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News in brief

Democrats grapple with Trump effect as primary draws near

WASHINGTON (AP) — Months of intense focus on the Republican race — and front-runner Donald Trump — have reverberated through the Democratic field, prompting front-runner Hillary Clinton to turn her attention to her would-be GOP challengers and leaving her chief rival, Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, gasping for airtime.

Now, after spending weeks largely out of the spotlight, Clinton plans to intensify her campaign schedule from an almost incumbent-style effort to a more aggressive, first-timer approach.

With just six weeks left before the first round of primary voting, Clinton plans a series of multi-day swings through Iowa starting in January, interspersing trips there with stops in New Hampshire and other early primary states. Her campaign will also unveil what Clinton has called her “not-so-secret weapon,” sending her husband, former President Bill Clinton, out to hit the stump after months of behind-the-scenes activity, wooing donors in private events.

And in a sign of the escalating battle between the two party front-runners, her campaign was forced to engage with Trump on Tuesday after he called Clinton’s bathroom break during the recent debate “disgusting” and said she was “schlonged” in the 2008 race for the Democratic nomination, using a vulgar Yiddish term to describe her loss to now-President Barack Obama. On Twitter Tuesday, Trump denied the word was vulgar and said it simply means “beaten badly.”

In an interview Tuesday with The Des Moines Register, Clinton said: “I don’t know that he has any boundaries at all. His bigotry, his bluster, his bullying have become his campaign.”

Woman due in court in fatal Las Vegas Strip pedestrian crash

LAS VEGAS (AP) — A woman from Oregon accused of intentionally plowing her car with her 3-year-old daughter in the back seat through crowds of pedestrians on a Las Vegas Strip sidewalk faces a judge Wednesday on felony murder, hit-and-run and child abuse charges.

But one key question is likely to remain unanswered during Lakeisha Nicole Holloway’s initial court appearance: What might have driven a 24-year-old former model of accomplishment by at-risk teens to what authorities call a homicidal act that put her child in danger?

One of her public defense attorneys, Joseph Abood, said Holloway plans to plead not guilty. In Nevada, the plea is assumed during an initial court appearance. Holloway won’t be asked to answer the charges against her until a preliminary hearing in coming weeks.

“We can all agree this is a shocking and tragic event,” Abood said as he expressed sympathy for the families of Jessica Valenzuela and at least 35 people injured in the Sunday evening crash near the Paris Las Vegas resort.

Valenzuela, 32, was from Buckeye, Arizona. Officials said the more than 35 other people who were hurt were from California, Colorado, Florida, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Washington state, Mexico and Quebec, Canada. Three were still in critical condition Tuesday.

Slain Muslim students’ families fight grief to honor legacy

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — Shortly before they were gunned down, a young Muslim couple was eating out with relatives when the conversation turned to anti-Islamic attitudes in the United States.

It was January 2015, months before the massacres in Chattanooga, Paris and San Bernardino. Deah Barakat and Yusor Abu-Salha had just gotten married and started living together in an apartment near the University of North Carolina.

When Barakat’s mother worried aloud that the family could be harmed because of their religion, “we were all laughing it off, like: ‘Nothing bad is going to happen. This is America,’” said Deah’s brother, Farris.

“Watch it happen,” Farris Barakat recalled his sister-in-law saying. “You guys won’t be laughing.”

About 10 days later, the couple was killed in their apartment along with Yusor’s younger sister, Razan.

A white neighbor, who described himself as an atheist and expressed disdain for religion, has been charged with capital murder.

Palestinian eviction case spotlights Jerusalem settler push

JERUSALEM (AP) — Ahmad Sub-Laban’s family has lived for decades under threat of eviction from their home overlooking the gold-topped Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem’s Old City. The experience inspired the 37-year-old Palestinian father of two to become a researcher for groups fighting attempts by Jewish settlers to move into properties in the city’s central Arab areas.

The Israeli Supreme Court is now poised to rule in the final legal battle over the apartment, and Sub-Laban has tapped into his network of contacts to try to halt the eviction by putting pressure on the Israeli government.

“We built a campaign no one can ignore,” said Sub-Laban. By talking about the case and inviting Western diplomats to his home in the historic Muslim Quarter, he also hopes to draw attention to the dozens of other Palestinian families at risk of being forced out of their homes in Jerusalem.

Under a long-standing U.S. framework for a peace deal, Jerusalem would be divided into two capitals, with Jewish neighborhoods going to Israel and the Arab ones to Palestine.

Afghan minister: Troops rushed to area under Taliban attack

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Reinforcements have been rushed to a besieged southern district threatened for days with takeover by Taliban fighters, Afghanistan’s acting defense minister said on Wednesday.

Fighting in the Sangin district of Helmand was continuing as army and police arrived to help security forces who had been pinned down for days, Masoom Stanekzai said.

Afghanistan’s embattled security forces needed international military help, especially air support, which would help reduce casualties, Stanekzai told reporters.

Sangin is an important poppy-growing district in Helmand, which borders Pakistan and sits on transport routes for drugs, arms and other lucrative contraband.

“The Helmand battle is not easy because the province has a long border, is a core of opium production, and our enemies are well-equipped and deeply involved in the smuggling of drugs,” he said. “These factors complicate the battle for Sangin.”

Door panel saves man buried 67 hours in China landslide

BEIJING (AP) — Squeezed into a narrow room under piles of debris for 67 hours, a young man was saved by a door that trapped his foot but gave him space to survive. Rescuers on Wednesday pulled him from the massive mudslide that hit part of a major manufacturing city in southern China.

In a feeble voice migrant worker Tian Zeming, 21, told rescuers his name and that another person was buried near him, according to authorities. But medical and rescue staff who went down into the rubble found the second person had not survived.

More than 70 people are still missing after the mountain of construction waste material and mud collapsed at midday Sunday and flowed into an industrial park in Shenzhen. The city near Hong Kong makes products ranging from cellphones to cars that are sold around the world and it attracts workers from all parts of China.

Zhang Hu, a city vice mayor, told a news conference that four bodies had been found. He said that even though the critical 72-hour period to find survivors had passed, they were continuing rescue efforts with a team of 5,000.

Upside-down weather pattern across US linked to El Nino

SEATTLE (AP) — Astrid Rau just baked 16 kinds of Christmas cookies, including a batch in the

shape of snowflakes. But she’s nevertheless having trouble getting in the holiday spirit, thanks to forecasts that have the temperature in her hometown of Perkasio, Pennsylvania, hitting 72 degrees on Thursday.

“I associate cold with Christmas,” the 55-year-old says. “And if it’s warm it just doesn’t feel quite right to me.”

A weather pattern partly linked with El Nino has turned winter upside-down across the U.S. during a week of heavy holiday travel, bringing spring-like warmth to the Northeast, a risk of tornadoes in the South and so much snow across the West that even skiing slopes have been overwhelmed.

In a reversal of a typical Christmas, forecasters expect New York to be in the mid-60s on the holiday — several degrees higher than Los Angeles.

The mild conditions have helped golf courses in New England do brisk business, but the pattern comes at a steep cost for ski resorts that have closed and for backcountry skiers who confront avalanche risks. And like Rau, many Americans complain that it just doesn’t feel like the holidays without a chill in the air.

Blanched onions: Chipotle tweaks cooking after E. coli scare

NEW YORK (AP) — After an E. coli outbreak that sickened more than 50 people, Chipotle is tweaking its cooking methods.

Onions will be dipped in boiling water to kill germs before they’re chopped. Raw chicken will be marinated in re-sealable plastic bags, rather than in bowls. Cilantro will be added to freshly cooked rice so the heat gets rid of microbes in the garnish.

“When you’re given a project like this, you look at the universe of hazards,” said Mansour Samadpour, CEO of IEH Laboratories, which was hired by Chipotle to tighten its procedures.

The changes mark a dramatic turn in fortunes for Chipotle, which has surged in popularity by touting its “Food With Integrity” slogan. As it expanded to more than 1,900 locations, the company also sought to draw a distinction between itself and other fast-food chains that executives said use “chemical additives” and “cheap artificial ingredients.”

Now, Chipotle Mexican Grill Inc. may be suffering from traits that helped define it. In its annual report in February, the Denver company noted it may be at a higher risk for foodborne illnesses because of its use of “fresh produce and meats rather than frozen,” and its traditional cooking methods, rather than “automation.”

Fireball streaking across US sky was Russian rocket debris

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Military officials say a streak of light seen burning across the sky by people in three Western states was debris from a Russian rocket re-entering the atmosphere.

U.S. Strategic Command spokeswoman Julie Ziegenhorn says the fireball seen over Arizona, Nevada and California in Tuesday’s night sky was an SL-4 rocket body booster from Russia that was launched Monday.

Dozens of people took to social media to share videos and photos and marvel at the white fireball flying through the sky that some described as a shooting star. Others wondered if it was a meteor breaking up on re-entry or space debris from a fallen satellite.

Russia’s Federal Space Agency declined to comment.

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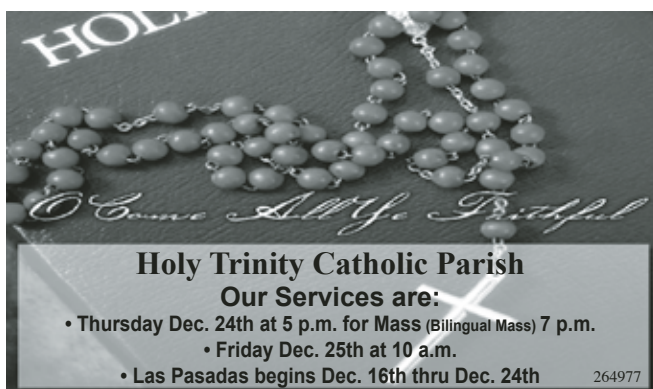
Randy Cotton
Pastor

Sunday School.....9:45am

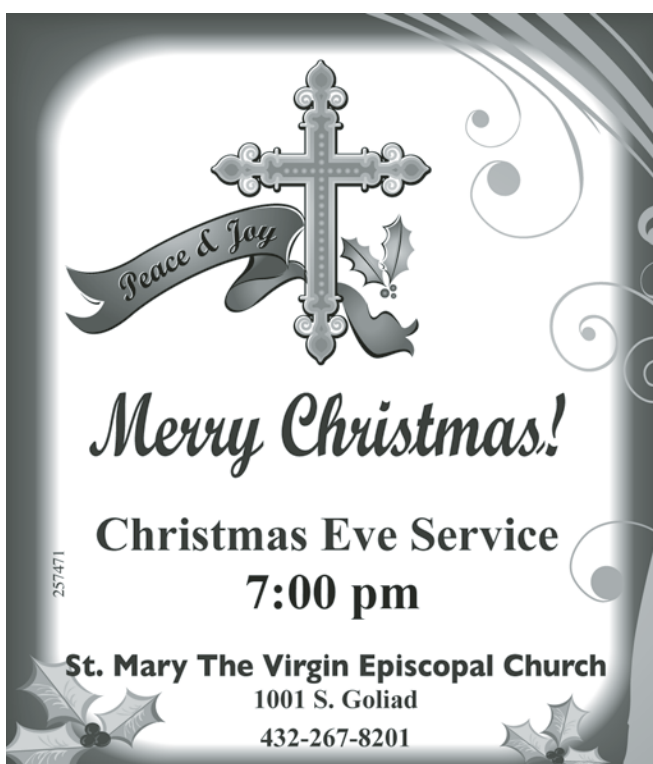
Morning Worship...11:00am

Sunday Evening...6:00pm

Wednesday Service...7:00pm



Holy Trinity Catholic Parish
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• Friday Dec. 25th at 10 a.m.
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December 31st
New Year’s Eve Services • 7:00 p.m.
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Lutheran Church - LCMS
2805 Lynn
264-7818

The Rangers had a really good winter in July

Imagine that the Rangers didn't trade for Cole Hamels.

They didn't trade for Hamels, because before they could do that, he said yes to Houston. They didn't trade for Hamels and Jake Diekmann, because Houston got them both, and didn't need to trade for Oliver Perez two weeks later.

They didn't trade for Hamels, Diekmann, and Sam Dyson, because Philadelphia made a deal it liked better and because Miami knew better than to shuffle the deck for a couple potential role players when there was absolutely no urgency to do so.

Texas, without Hamels, Diekmann, and Dyson didn't play in

October, aside from the four games against the Angels that ended the regular season, one of which Jerad Eickhoff started. Alec Asher started another one of them.

Houston didn't get Carlos Gomez and Mike Fiers, because two of the Astros prospects that are now Brewers prospects (lefthander Josh Hader and outfielder Brett Phillips) went to the Phillies instead, so they didn't get that Fiers no-hitter but they also didn't end up 4-6 in games. Fiers would have started. Jake Marisnick (.665 OPS) got the bulk of the center field starts that Gomez (.670 OPS with the Astros) would have gotten.

Perez (6.75 ERA, .275/.327/.471 opponent's slash), an impending free agent, never arrived in Houston, because Diekmann (2.08, 169/.247/.273) — with three and a half years of control remaining — did. And Diekmann was big for the Astros in the

playoffs.

Texas finished strong but didn't win 10 of the 12 regular season games that Hamels would have started, and didn't quite get the .195/.246/.274 opponents' slash in the 53 innings that Diekmann and Dyson would have contributed, or the two relievers' 50 strikeouts and seven walks. Also the bullpeners who would have gotten those innings gave up a lot more than Diekmann and Dyson's three combined home runs and posted an ERA somewhat north of their 1.53.

Texas lost onto not only Eickhoff and Asher, but also Jorge Alfaro (who returned to action on a minor league rehab assignment for a week), Jake Thompson, and Nick Williams, the latter two of whom headlined every Rangers trade rumor as the winter got underway, because with Chi Chi Gonzalez and Eickhoff and Asher, Texas had some doorstep starting pitching to offer teams, and

because Lewis Brinson gave Texas some more doorstep outfield depth to deal from, and Williams didn't project to offer the same plus or minus right-handedness that Brinson offered, not an unimportant thing given how heavily the Texas lineup (now and going forward) tilted so far to the left.

Texas had significant pitching staff needs going into the winter, as the rotation was headed by Derek Holland and Martin Perez, coming off second-half returns from injury, and Yu Darvish, whose 2016 would be delayed at least a month. Colby Lewis and Gonzalez were legitimate candidates to start, and Eickhoff showed enough promise down the stretch to join Nick Martinez as spring training competitors, along with Asher and Anthony Ranaudo and Carlos Frias, the righthander Texas was wasn't the key piece from the Dodgers in the

Yovani Gallardo trade deadline deal, but the closest to the big leagues. Perhaps even Matt Harrison would still be in the mix, though it would be a long shot.

However, this is the Darvish-Beltre window, and though the American League had no great teams, the Rangers knew they needed an impact off-season boost to compete for a pennant in 2016. The rotation needed help, as did the bullpen, which got a great year from Shawn Tolleson and Keone Kela, but not such a great one from Tanner Scheppers. Sam Freeman was solid, and Luke Jackson and Andrew Faulkner showed a ton of late-season promise, but there weren't enough established relief arms going into the winter, especially with the shape of the rotation promising a heavy bullpen workload.

The Rangers were well-armed to go get pitching help. They had frontline prospects

in the upper levels of the farm (or in the big leagues) on the mound (Gonzalez, Thompson, Eickhoff, Asher, Jackson, Faulkner), behind the plate (Alfaro), in the infield (Joey Gallo), and in the outfield (Brinson, Williams, Noma, Mazara).

They also had some payroll room as well, with a loaded crop of free agent starters and relievers to engage.

They could have traded for Shelby Miller.

Though most believe it would have taken more than Thompson, Williams, Alfaro, Eickhoff, and Asher to get the Braves to decline Arizona's offer of Ender Inciarte, Dansby Swanson, and Aaron Blair. (And that's without factoring in the Harrison piece, which favored Texas.) They could have approached Miami on Jose Fernandez, but the Marlins apparently wanted that same Diamondbacks pack

See **RANGERS**, Page 9

Sharp beats former team, leading Stars past Blackhawks 4-0

DALLAS (AP) — Patrick Sharp doesn't see it getting any easier to play Chicago, even when he scores against his former team in a dominant victory that shows Dallas as the team to beat in the Western Conference.

The veteran forward simply spent too many years and won too many Stanley Cups with the Blackhawks.

"It really wasn't that fun of a game," Sharp said after getting a goal and an assist Tuesday night in a 4-0 victory that gave the Stars an NHL-leading 26 wins and 54 points. "Hockey's a game you play with a lot of intensity, and that's hard to do against your buddies."

It was Sharp's first regular-season game against Chicago since coming to the Stars in an off-season trade when the Blackhawks were trying to save salary-cap space. He had just won his third Stanley Cup in

six seasons, and spent 10 years with the Blackhawks.

Sharp scored 11 seconds into the third period to give Dallas a 2-0 lead in what had been a game with few chances between the highest-scoring teams in the West. His goal sparked a 17-3 shot advantage in third period.

"I wouldn't say we dominated," Sharp said. "It's tough to dominate a team like Chicago."

Antti Niemi stopped 20 shots for his third shutout this season a night after replacing Kari Lehtonen less than 10 minutes into a 6-3 win at Minnesota when the Stars rallied from a quick 2-0 deficit.

The first of five meetings between likely West contenders featured the league's top three scorers in Chicago's Patrick Kane and Dallas' Tyler Seguin and Jamie Benn. And yet each team went more than 10 minutes without a shot at some

point in the first two periods.

Jason Spezza had the only goal in the first 40 minutes when he passed to himself to get by defenders while crossing the blue line and slipped the puck between Corey Crawford's pad and the post in the second period.

Sharp took a pass from Benn while racing up the right wing just after the third-period faceoff and beat Crawford over his left shoulder. Jason Demers had the first of his two assists on the play.

Less than 3 minutes later, Colton Sceviour tipped in a shot from the blue line by Jordie Benn for his first goal in 16 games.

"They just grabbed the momentum and never let us get it back," said Chicago's Jonathan Toews, who was held without a shot while Kane had just one. "I think we didn't do what we had to do to take it



AP photo

Dallas Stars left wing Patrick Sharp (10) celebrates his goal with teammate Dallas Stars center Tyler Seguin (91) during the third period of an NHL hockey game Tuesday, Dec. 22, 2015, in Dallas. The Stars won 4-0.

back, either." Dallas defenseman Johnny Oduya had a

steady if quiet Chicago reunion compared to Sharp after signing as

a free agent following two Cup titles with the Blackhawks. He had three blocked shots in 20 minutes.

The best moment for Niemi in his 35th career shutout came while protecting a 1-0 lead late in the second period. He turned away a shot from close range by former Dallas forward Ryan Garbutt, who was part of the Sharp trade. Niemi made a spread-eagle stop on the rebound when Andrew Desjardins tried to slip the puck under his leg.

"I thought he made a couple of big saves," Stars coach Lindy Ruff said. "We were great defensively in front of him. I don't think they had a scoring chance in the third period."

The Stars went about 14 minutes without a shot between the first and second periods, and the Blackhawks

See **STARS**, Page 15

Scoreboard

NBA
Sunday's Games
Miami 116, Portland 109
Minnesota 100, Brooklyn 85
Cleveland 108, Philadelphia 86
Milwaukee 101, Phoenix 95
Sacramento 104, Toronto 94
Atlanta 103, Orlando 100
New Orleans 130, Denver 125
Monday's Games
Washington 113, Sacramento 99
Boston 113, Minnesota 99
Orlando 107, New York 99
Brooklyn 105, Chicago 102
Houston 102, Charlotte 95
Atlanta 106, Portland 97
San Antonio 106, Indiana 92
Utah 110, Phoenix 89
Oklahoma City 100, L.A. Clippers 99
Tuesday's Games
Memphis 104, Philadelphia 90
Toronto 103, Dallas 99
Detroit 93, Miami 92
L.A. Lakers 111, Denver 107
Wednesday's Games
New York at Cleveland, 7 p.m.
Sacramento at Indiana, 7 p.m.
Houston at Orlando, 7 p.m.
Memphis at Washington, 7 p.m.
Boston at Charlotte, 7 p.m.
Dallas at Brooklyn, 7:30 p.m.

San Antonio at Minnesota, 8 p.m.
Portland at New Orleans, 8 p.m.
Philadelphia at Milwaukee, 8 p.m.
Detroit at Atlanta, 8 p.m.
Denver at Phoenix, 9 p.m.
Utah at Golden State, 10:30 p.m.
Oklahoma City at L.A. Lakers, 10:30 p.m.
NHL
Sunday's Games
Florida 5, Vancouver 4, SO
Boston 2, New Jersey 1, SO
Tampa Bay 5, Ottawa 2
Detroit 4, Calgary 2
Washington 7, N.Y. Rangers 3
Chicago 4, San Jose 3, OT
Monday's Games
N.Y. Islanders 5, Anaheim 2
Philadelphia 4, St. Louis 3
Pittsburgh 5, Columbus 2
Washington 2, Carolina 1
Nashville 5, Montreal 1
Dallas 6, Minnesota 3
Toronto 7, Colorado 4
Edmonton 3, Winnipeg 1
Tuesday's Games
Florida 2, Ottawa 1, SO
St. Louis 2, Boston 0
N.Y. Rangers 3, Anaheim 2, OT
New Jersey 4, Detroit 3
Vancouver 2, Tampa Bay 1
Minnesota 2, Montreal 1
Dallas 4, Chicago 0
Calgary 4, Winnipeg 1
Arizona 3, Toronto 2
San Jose 5, Los Angeles 3
Wednesday's Games

No games scheduled
Thursday's Games
No games scheduled
TRANSACTIONS
BASEBALL
MLB — Named Charles Hill managing director of MLB Europe, Middle East and Africa.
American League
CLEVELAND INDIANS — Released 3B Chris Johnson. Agreed to terms with LHP Ross Detwiler on a minor league contract.
National League
ST. LOUIS CARDINALS — Agreed to terms with RHP Mike Leake on a five-year contract.
BASKETBALL
National Basketball Association
MEMPHIS GRIZZLIES — Reassigned Fs James Ennis and Jarrell Martin and G Russ Smith to Iowa (NBADL).
MINNESOTA TIMBERWOLVES — Recalled G Tyus Jones from Idaho (NBADL).
FOOTBALL
National Football League
ARIZONA CARDINALS — Placed S Tyrann Mathieu on injured reserve. Re-signed S Chris Clemons.
BALTIMORE RAVENS — Placed TE Crockett Gillmore on injured reserve. Placed LB Brennen Beyer on the practice squad injured list. Signed LB Chris Carter. Signed DE Nardly Capi to the practice squad.
BUFFALO BILLS — Placed

LB Randell Johnson and WR Robert Woods on injured reserve and T Seantrel Henderson on the reserve/non-football illness list. Released WR Dezmin Lewis. Signed WR Walter Powell and Greg Salas and DE Jerel Worthy. Signed TE Jacob Maxwell and QB Zac Dysart to the practice squad.
CHICAGO BEARS — Waived RB Antone Smith. Terminated the practice squad contract of DL Toby Johnson. Signed DT D'Anthony Smith from the practice squad and CB De'Vante Bausby and DL Davon Coleman to the practice squad.
CLEVELAND BROWNS — Placed OL John Greco on injured reserve. Re-signed WR Darius Jennings.
GREEN BAY PACKERS — Placed LS Brett Goode on injured reserve. Signed LS Rick Lovato.
HOUSTON TEXANS — Placed QB T.J. Yates on injured reserve. Signed QB B.J. Daniels from the practice squad.
MIAMI DOLPHINS — Placed LBs Koa Misi and Chris McCain on injured reserve. Re-signed LB James-Michael Johnson and OL Jacques McClendon. Signed G Shelley Smith.
MINNESOTA VIKINGS — Signed LB Alex Singleton to the practice squad.
NEW ENGLAND PATRI-

OTS — Placed LB Eric Martin on injured reserve. Released DL Ishmael Kitchen. Signed RB Steven Jackson.
NEW YORK JETS — Signed WR Joe Anderson to the practice squad.
TENNESSEE TITANS — Placed DT Mike Martin on injured reserve. Signed QB Alex Tanney from Indianapolis' practice squad.
WASHINGTON REDSKINS — Signed TE Marcel Jensen from Buffalo's practice squad.
Canadian Football League
EDMONTON ESKIMOS — Signed SB Adarius Bowman and DT Almondo Sewell to contract extensions through 2017.
HOCKEY
National Hockey League
NASHVILLE PREDATORS — Recalled D Petter Granberg from his conditioning assignment with Milwaukee (AHL).
WASHINGTON CAPITALS — Reassigned D Connor Carrick to Hershey (AHL).
American Hockey League
SAN DIEGO GULLS — Announced LW Max Friberg was reassigned to the team by Anaheim (NHL).
SOCCER
Major League Soccer
LA GALAXY — Transferred D Omar Gonzalez to CF Pachuca (Liga MX-Mexico).
NEW YORK RED BULLS — Signed F Alex Muijl.

National Women's Soccer League
WASHINGTON SPIRIT — Waived D Josephine Chukwunonye.
WESTERN NEW YORK FLASH — Announced the resignation of coach Aaron Lines, who will remain with the club in a management position.
North American Soccer League
JACKSONVILLE ARMADA — Signed D Tyler Ruthven.
COLLEGE
NCAA — Placed Hawaii's men's basketball program on probation for three years.
BALL STATE — Announced the resignation of football coach Pete Lembo to become assistant head coach and special teams coordinator at Maryland.
MIAMI — Suspended S Jamal Carter for the Sun Bowl for violating a team policy. Announced DT Courtlet Jenkins was declared academically ineligible.
PURDUE — Named Terry Malone offensive coordinator in addition to his duties as tight ends coach.
TEXAS STATE — Announced the retirement of football coach Dennis Franchione.
WISCONSIN — Named Howard Moore men's assistant basketball coach.

DeRozan helps Raptors edge Mavericks 103-99

TORONTO (AP) — This time, DeMar DeRozan and the Toronto Raptors grabbed control with a big first quarter. DeRozan scored 28 points and Bismack Biyombo had a career-high 20 rebounds, leading the Raptors to a 103-99 victory over the Dallas Mavericks on Tuesday night.

Toronto led 32-16 after one for its biggest advantage of the season after 12 minutes. DeRozan had 10 points in the opening quarter.

"We just have to have that sense of urgency right out of the gate and understand that teams are coming after us," DeRozan said.

"We can't wait and we have to be the ones to throw the first punch and that's what we did tonight."

Toronto lost Sunday at home after trailing Sacramento 37-18 after the first quarter. The Raptors came into Tuesday night having dropped eight of 10 games when losing after 12 minutes.

Dallas' 16 points in the first were the fewest allowed by Toronto in an

opening period this season.

Kyle Lowry had 17 points, 10 rebounds and seven assists for Toronto, which swept the two-game season series against Dallas. Terrence Ross scored 16 points, and Luis Scola finished with 15 points and nine rebounds.

The Raptors appeared to be on their way to a comfortable victory with five minutes to go in the fourth. But the Mavericks battled back.

Jeremy Evans scored with 11.6 seconds remaining to trim Toronto's lead to 101-99, but missed a foul shot that would have got Dallas within one. Ross then closed it out with a couple of free throws.

Biyombo also had nine points and blocked two shots.

"He does a man's job as far as rebounding the ball and going and getting it and protecting the paint," Toronto coach Dwane Casey said.

Dirk Nowitzki led the way for Dallas with 20 points and seven rebounds. Wesley Matthews had 15 points be-

fore a sellout crowd at Air Canada Centre.

"It's obviously hard when you run behind like that and you've got to keep fighting to get back into the game," Nowitzki said.

Nowitzki hit a 26-foot 3-pointer to cut the Raptors' lead to three points in the second minute of the fourth.

But Toronto responded with a 15-2 run over the next five minutes. The Raptors hit four 3s during that key stretch, including a pair by Cory Joseph on consecutive trips up the court followed by another from Ross.

"I was really impressed with the way he responded tonight," Casey said of Joseph, who had 12 points in 27 minutes, including 10 points in the final period.

Charlie Villanueva, who scored all nine of his points in the final quarter as the Mavericks made a push, said his team needs "to play with more disposition, more energy and be scrappier."

"Toronto was a team

that had just lost to Sacramento so they were hungry," he said. "And, we'd just come out of a great win against Memphis and it just appeared that we were a little laid back."

Toronto forward James Johnson injured his ankle in warmups and did not dress. Then the Raptors lost Patrick Patterson to flu-like symptoms, leaving them with just nine players available.

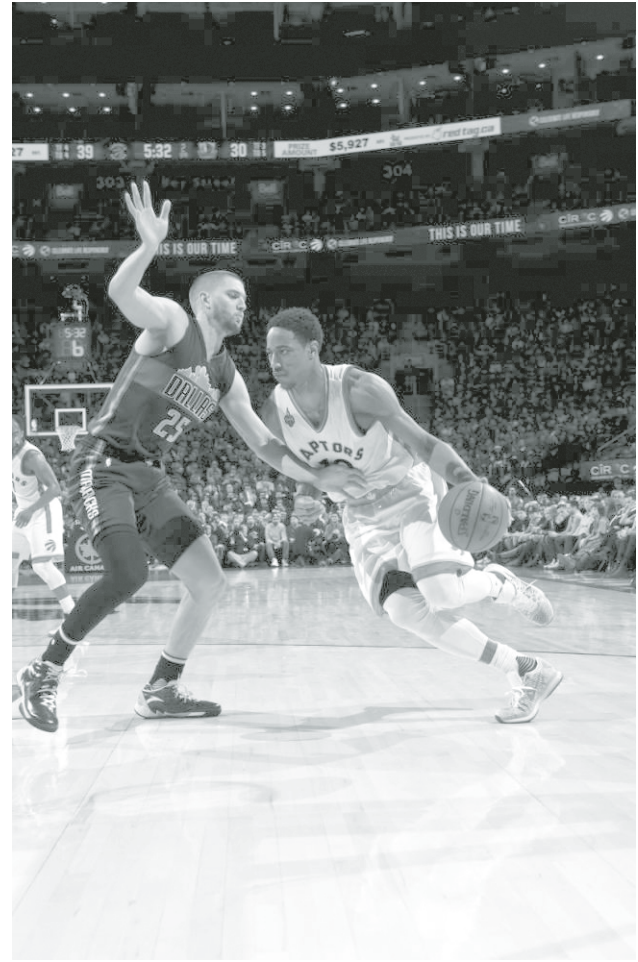
"We have a resilient team and tonight everybody stepped up," Lowry said.

TIP-INS
Mavericks: G Deron Williams left with a strained left hamstring in the third quarter and did not return. ... The Mavericks dropped to 4-10 when they score under 100 points.

Raptors: Ross has scored in double digits for a season-high five straight games.

COACHING CONNECTIONS

Casey, who was an assistant to Mavericks coach Rick Carlisle for three seasons from 2008-11, improved to 5-4



AP photo
DeMar DeRozan #10 of the Toronto Raptors drives to the basket against Chandler Parsons #25 of the Dallas Mavericks on December 22, 2015 at the Air Canada Centre in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

against his former boss. **BOXING CHAMPION** Len
Former heavyweight **See MAVS, Page 15**

RANGERS

Continued from Page 8

age plus Patrick Corbin and Brandon Drury.

Let's see what Tyson Ross or Andrew Cashner fetch for the Padres, or Carlos Carrasco or Danny Salazar bring Cleveland. It will be a ton, if they're traded at all because everyone wants pitching. Reliable pitching.

The Rangers could have instead gotten involved in the open market, and though they wouldn't have played on David Price or Zack Greinke at those dollar levels, maybe they could have given Jordan Zimmermann five years and \$110 million, Jeff Samardzija five/\$90MM, Hisashi Iwakuma three/\$45MM, J.A. Happ three/\$36MM, or John Lackey two/\$32MM. That's assuming those pitchers would have taken those same dollars from Texas.

To bolster the bull-

pen, Texas could have gone ahead and traded Leonys Martin and Anthony Bass to Seattle for Tom Wilhelmson (plus corner bat Patrick Kivlehan and center fielder James Jones), and now you've got Wilhelmson and Tolleson in place as reliable arms for the back of the pen. The Rangers could have ventured into Japan and prevailed in the competition to sign righthander Tony Barnette and his filthy sink and cut for a reported two years plus a club option.

But would Wilhelmson and Barnette, added to Tolleson, Kela, Schepers, Freeman, Jackson, and Faulkner have been enough to give the Rangers confidence that they had a winning combination in the bullpen, set to support a contending team?

Texas could have jumped into the reliever market and competed to sign Darren O'Day at four years and \$31 million (though he wanted to stay in the Baltimore-

D.C. Area), Joakim Soria at three/\$25MM, Ryan Madson at three/\$22MM, Tony Sipp at three/\$18MM, Shawn Kelley at three/\$15MM, Mark Lowe at two/\$11MM, Steve Cishek at two/\$10MM (that could end up being as much as two/\$17MM), John Axford at two/\$10MM, Jason Motte at two/\$10MM, Jonathan Broxton at two/\$7.5MM, Perez at two/\$7MM, Chad Qualls at two/\$6MM, or Rich Hill at one/\$6MM.

Or traded the equivalent of righthanders Vincent Velasquez, Mark Appel, and Thomas Eshelman, lefthander Brett Oberholtzer, and infielder Harold Arauz to Philadelphia for Ken Giles (and minor league shortstop Jonathan Arauz). (One rival club executive, asked to evaluate what Houston gave up this week to get Giles said that, if the Phillies were to move Velasquez to the bullpen, the rookie could be "just as good as Giles.")

The Rangers could have signed Happ this winter and had him, theoretically, for the next three seasons at \$36 million, but they traded for Hamels at around the same effective payroll hit (not counting this past summer's two-months-plus-playoff-run) instead. That is, unless they exercise a club option to keep Hamels around an extra year.

They could have traded a massive package of prospects to control Ken Giles through 2020, but they traded Tomas Telis and Cody Ege to control Sam Dyson through 2020 instead. And they got four pennant races of Jake Diekman tossed into the Hamels deal.

Rather than going out and signing Tony Sipp, who'd been designated for assignment 16 months ago, for three years and \$18 million.

Would you rather have Giles than Dyson? Maybe.

But what if Philadelphia had been using Giles in the seventh and eighth inning the last couple months before trading him and Miami had been closing with Dyson, rather than the opposite? How would their trade value have changed, artificially?

Texas will pay Hamels

less in 2016, and less in 2017, during the Darvish window, than the Cubs will pay Lackey. And Texas will have Hamels another year after that, and maybe two.

Texas will pay Dyson a little more this year than it will pay Jackson at the big league level. The following year, too.

You could have between two and three Diekman's this year for what the Rockies will pay Qualls. Or four Diekman's for what Oakland will pay Axford, whom the Indians allowed the Pirates to claim on waivers in mid-August.

Houston is probably going to overpay Kazmir to return this winter, or overpay for some other starting pitcher, either in dollars and years or in prospects, because that's where the market has gone, not unpredictably.

The Astros could have instead had Hamels for 2016, 2017, and 2018, with a club option for 2019 — not to mention to boost what was already a storybook 2015.

If he hadn't vetoed their trade with the

Phillie.

But he did, and that led to Texas adding a front-line starter — and front-line reliever — to a team that then picked up another shutdown bullpen arm and stormed from that point forward to 162+.

What Texas did on July 29 and July 31 changed everything, as far as the 2015 season was concerned.

But the Rangers didn't only earn a return to the playoffs when they picked up Cole Hamels, Jake Diekman, and Sam Dyson.

The Rangers moves for the present and the future back in July are why we haven't seen a big splash in free agency by the Rangers thus far. However, those moves mean that we should see the Rangers making trades come late July of 2016 not for prospects, but for another run at the World Series.

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Public Notice

Howard County Public Hearing

Howard County will be conducting a Public Hearing on December 28, 2015 at 5:30 p.m. in the Commissioner's Court room on the 3rd floor of the Howard County Courthouse. We will be asking for comments on speed limits for Driver Road from Riva Ridge Rd east to the end of the pavement. Brian Klinksiek the Howard County Engineer, will be available for discussion on December 28, 2015 from 5:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

#8925 December 23 & 27, 2015

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LEGAL AUTHORITY: Chapter 27 of the Texas Water Code, as amended, Title 3 of the Texas Natural Resources Code, as amended, and the Statewide Rules of the Oil and Gas Division of the Railroad Commission of Texas.

Requests for a public hearing from persons who can show they are adversely affected or requests for further information concerning any aspect of the application should be submitted in writing, within fifteen days of publication, to the Environmental Services Section, Oil and Gas Division, Railroad Commission of Texas, P.O. Box 12967, Austin, Texas 78711 (Telephone 512/463-6792).

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2	5	6	8	9	4	7	1	3
9	7	3	5	2	1	6	4	8
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Tomorrow's Horoscope



Breezy Moon

The Gemini moon rallies for levity. This is a fine day for taking things at surface value. Not everything needs the application of deep thought. Over-think and you'll weave together disparate sections into a design as intricate as a spider web (which, besides being a home, is also a trap). Keep it breezy now; you can always ponder later.

HOLIDAY MATHIS

ARIES (March 21-April 19). Something you thought you were through with still holds an electric charge. Maybe you're not as "over it" as you thought, but you're getting there. Wrap your head around it once more, and once more let it go.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). Try not to confuse attachment with connection. Connection is mostly love. Attachment is mostly fear. Connection is magnetic. Attachment adheres

by grasping. **GEMINI** (May 21-June 21). There's much to appreciate in a special relationship. For starters, you are somehow each able to grow in a direction that feels personally fulfilling without growing apart from one another.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). People-watching will be a source of entertainment and education for you. You've a talent for making accurate observations. You'll be able to apply this to your own life, too.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). Sometimes you do wonder if you could be more content in a slightly different scenario than the one you're living out now. You'll get a peek into a world that makes you imagine different futures.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). Time constraints bring stress and frustration. Do what you can to eliminate or ease them wherever possible. It's a good time to consciously decide to be socially flexible and generally

easygoing. **LIBRA** (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). Winston Churchill suggested, "The empires of the future are the empires of the mind." You are leaning toward a less materialistic definition of success these days.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). You'll attract people who are spiritual like you. They may not share your religion (or lack of one) and they may not share your belief system, but they star-gaze, just like you, in awe of something bigger.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). The happy thoughts have energy. The unhappy thoughts, unfortunately, have more. Who notices them? That person is an empathetic soul who will make your life better.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). How you landed in your particular support circle is a story of the coming together of thousands of small decisions, circumstances and impulses. Today you'll just be glad

for the way things panned out. **AQUARIUS** (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). Conversation is inevitable. Be forewarned, this will only be as interesting as the questions you ask. Your best partners in this are Gemini, Libra and other Aquarians.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). Being able to process difficult feelings is a skill that you were born with. That doesn't mean you can't improve upon the gift. Don't avoid or procrastinate the thing you know you need to experience.

TODAY'S BIRTHDAY (Dec. 23). The world is better because you were born, and this year you'll spend your energy and time proving that point. What you'll do with your psychic inheritance will be completely interesting to others and logical to you. February and August will be especially notable on the love-front. The main message: Don't hold back! Libra and Leo adore you. Your lucky numbers are: 49, 2, 25, 38 and 11.

HOLIDAY STRESS RELIEVERS: So many feel spent and blue in December. What can you do to counteract holiday stress?

AQUARIUS: The holidays coincide perfectly with cold and flu season. Luckily, there are some contagions that actually promote health. One in particular triggers changes in the body that raise energy, reverses the damage of stress, diminishes pain, and boosts the immune system. This contagion is highly infectious and, more good news, it's free. Can you guess what it is? Yes, it's laughter!

Most Aquarians have a sociable nature, offbeat thought process and open mind -- the perfect combination for a sense of humor that is out of this world. The only trouble with that kind of humor is that it's sometimes misinterpreted or missed completely by those who are situated in the dead center of the mainstream. That's why stress relief for Aquarius

has to do with getting the right cast of characters together -- the ones who are ready to laugh at all the right things. The psychological closeness that comes with funny sharing will also bring a shift of perspective. What seemed overwhelming will suddenly become manageable.

CELEBRITY PROFILES: Animal adventurer Martin Kratt and his brother Chris Kratt introduce children to remote wonders of the natural world with educational animal shows such as "Zoboomafoo" and "Wild Kratts." Kratt was born when the sun and moon were in challenge-loving Capricorn and Mercury was in worldly Sagittarius. Venus and Mars are in Aquarius, the sign of philanthropy and contribution.

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Annie's Mailbox

Dear Annie: After my dad died, my mom went to live out of state with my brother and his wife. My brother took control of everything. He convinced her that she was incapable of making her own decisions and had her open joint bank accounts that he has full access to.

Recently, Mom confided that she has no idea why she can never get over a certain amount of savings in her account. She knows she should have more money put away, but fully trusts my brother and will not confront him about it. My brother has also pushed me out of my mom's life. He will not let me visit her or allow her to come to my home. I am lucky if I get to speak with her once a day on the phone.

My children miss their grandmother and can't understand why there is such a drastic change in her behavior. Family is just not family anymore and the holidays seem sad. I don't know what to do. My brother and his wife want nothing to do with their niece and nephew. Please help. -- Missing Mom

Dear Missing: While it's possible that your mother simply doesn't remember what money is being put into her account,

it is more likely that your brother is taking advantage of her -- especially if he will not permit you to visit. This is very worrisome. If you believe your brother is being abusive toward Mom, either by stealing her money or preventing others from checking on her, please contact Adult Protective Services in the city where she lives or get information on local state resources through the National Center on Elder Abuse at www.ncea.aoa.gov.

Dear Annie: I read the letter from "Lonely Not Lusting," the 80-year-old woman who went on a date with a man who seemed nice, but who grabbed her breast when saying goodnight. It reminded me of the comments that my doctors always make after my exams.

I am in my 80s and single. Both doctors always ask if I'm sexually active. Then they warn me to make sure that my partner has been to his doctor and been tested for STDs. This is the age of Viagra and a large percentage of their practice is devoted to men with STDs, especially those living in assisted living and senior residences where the women greatly outnumber the men. The men I have been with

lately think we women are all just waiting for them to ravish us. How stupid can they be? Please consider educating people on this subject. -- N.

Dear N.: According to the CDC, the incidence of syphilis among seniors is up by 52 percent, and the number of chlamydia cases has risen 32 percent since 2007, many of these cases in retirement communities. The increase is attributed to living longer, healthier lives, along with the accessibility of erectile dysfunction drugs. Many seniors seem to believe that if pregnancy is not an issue, condom use is unimportant. But as we get older, our immune systems weaken, making

seniors much more susceptible to being infected.

We commend your doctors for discussing STDs with you. Medicare offers free STD screenings for seniors, and low-cost treatment for those who need it.

Annie's Mailbox is written by Kathy Mitchell and Marcy Sugar, longtime editors of the Ann Landers column. Please email your questions to anniesmailbox@creators.com, or write to: Annie's Mailbox, c/o Creators Syndicate, 737 3rd Street, Hermosa Beach, CA 90254. You can also find Annie on Facebook at Facebook.com/AskAnnies. To find out more about Annie's Mailbox and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate Web page at www.creators.com.

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Contract Bridge

By Steve Becker

A Crucial Defensive Play

North dealer.
North-South vulnerable.
NORTH
♠ K 4
♥ J 10 3
♦ 9 6 4
♣ Q 10 9 3 2
WEST
♠ Q 7 5 2
♥ 6 2
♦ Q 7 5
♣ 8 7 5 4
EAST
♠ J 8 6 3
♥ A 7 4
♦ K 10 8 3
♣ A 6
SOUTH
♠ A 10 9
♥ K Q 9 8 5
♦ A J 2
♣ K J

The bidding:
North East South West
Pass Pass 1♥ Pass
2♥ Pass 4♥
Opening lead — eight of clubs.
Familiarity with card combinations and how to deal with them can be helpful to the defenders as well as to the declarer. Most combinations do not present much of a test, since they repeat themselves time and again, but the less frequent ones are sometimes a challenge.
Take this case where West led a club against four hearts. East won with the ace and recognized that attacking diamonds offered the best chance for the defense. So he returned the three of diamonds, West

winning the trick with the queen after declarer followed low. It did not matter what West played next. Declarer later lost a trump trick and made exactly four.
However, East could have stopped the contract with a more judicious play at trick two. He had the right idea when he returned a diamond, but he chose the wrong one. He should have led the ten rather than the three.
Note the deadly effect of this play. If declarer goes up with the ace, the defenders eventually get two diamond tricks, as well as the trump ace. Equally, if he covers with the jack, West wins and returns a diamond to establish the setting trick, since East's K-8 are strategically positioned over dummy's 9-6. And if South ducks the ten entirely, so does West — and again the outcome is the same.
East's ten play, though it looks peculiar, can easily be justified. East reasons that if partner has any two diamond honors, the ten lead can do no harm. And if West has only one diamond honor — whether the jack or the ace — the ten play is again not injurious.
But if West's honor happens to be the queen, the ten return is necessary in order to neutralize dummy's nine. The ten is therefore the right play.

Tomorrow: Key-Card Blackwood.
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sudoku

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 through 9 with no repeats. That means no number is repeated in any row, column or box.

		5	4	8		3		
		9						6
6			1			2	7	
	8	1		7	3			
			5	2		6	4	
	9	7			8			2
3						4		
	4		1	5	9			

www.sudoku-puzzles.net

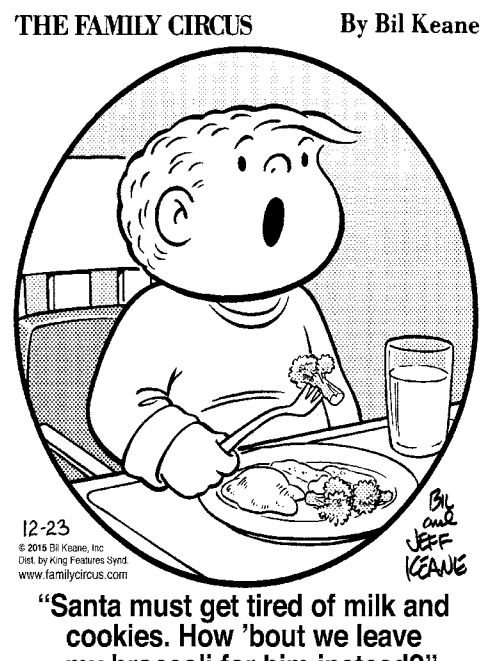
Table with 30 columns representing different TV channels and their programming for the day of Dec 23, 2015.

DENNIS THE MENACE



'YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO SAY 'HO-HO-HO'... NOT 'OH-NO-NO-NO!'

THE FAMILY CIRCUS

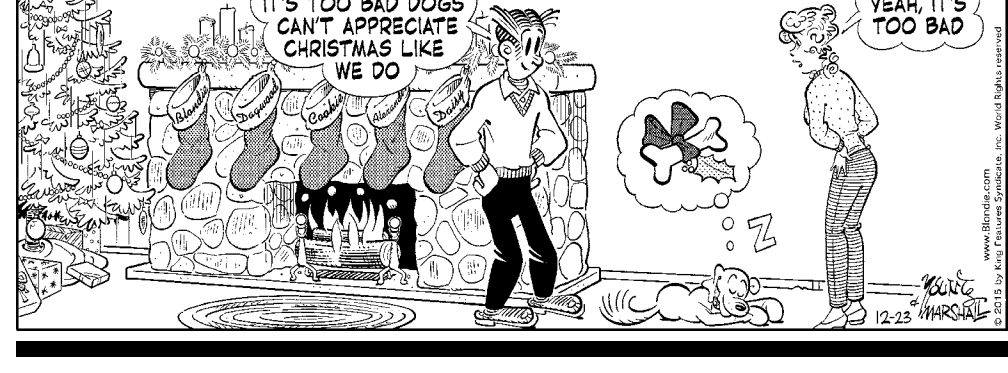


'Santa must get tired of milk and cookies. How 'bout we leave my broccoli for him instead?'

HAGAR



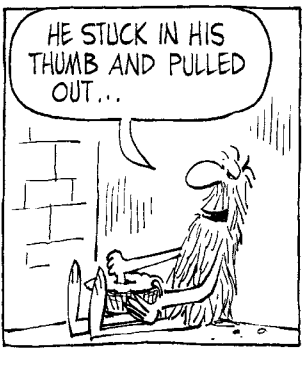
BLONDIE



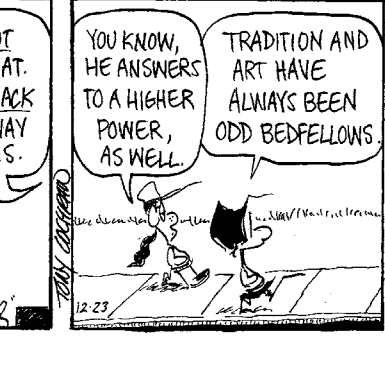
BC



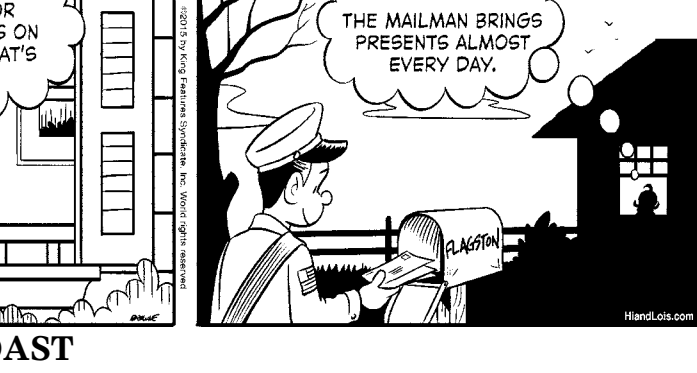
WIZARD OF ID



AGNES



HI AND LOIS



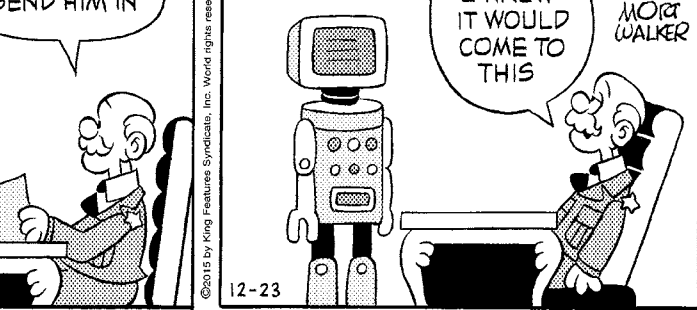
THE OTHER COAST



SNUFFY SMITH



BEETLE BAILEY



This Date In History

Today is Wednesday, Dec. 23, the 357th day of 2015. There are eight days left in the year. Today's Highlight in History: On Dec. 23, 1823, the poem 'Account of a Visit from St. Nicholas' was published...

rights of about 1,500 people who'd been jailed for opposing the (First) World War. In 1941, during World War II, American forces on Wake Island surrendered to the Japanese. In 1948, former Japanese premier Hideki Tojo and six other Japanese war leaders were executed in Tokyo.

Answer to previous puzzle: A crossword puzzle grid with the words SHAFIT, IRAS, ATOP, COCOA, DOLT, LAVA, ALIEN, TOUR, OXEN, REDSKY, ATMORNING, EKG, DUE, THORN, STEM, EGO, DRAG, OAHU, BOXER, YELLOW, SUBMARINE, EATER, KNEE, ALTO, DDS, SASS, RILES, POD, SN, GREEN, VEGETABLES, AIRS, EPIC, BRUTE, SPAT, REST, IRATE, PESO, BETS, TRUER.

Newsday Crossword

WHAT'S YOUR ANGLE? by Fred Piscop

- ACROSS: 1 Sitcom set in Korea, 5 Stars and Stripes, for one, 9 Subside, 14 Actress, 15 Brief part of a poem, 16 Computer repair experts, 17 Top-billed performer, 18 Memo-routing abbr., 19 Gawks at, 20 Where almost-remembered things are, 23 Bullfight cheer, 24 Split- soup, 25 Blood vessel, 29 Egyptian boy king, 31 Too hasty, 35 Deep ravine, 36 Mid-afternoon, 38 In addition, 39 Battle imaginary enemies, 42 Early afternoon, 43 Waters down, 44 Have a longing for, 45 Remainder, 47 Print-shop purchase, 48 Poked fun at, 49 Harry Potter's pal Weasley, 51 'That's awesome!', 52 Low-fat burger meat, 60 Brass section, 61 Enthusiastic, 62 Subtle glow, 63 Wonderland visitor, 64 Constructed, 65 Wide smile, 66 Frozen rain, 67 Said "not guilty," perhaps, 68 Ballad or carol, 11 Rights org., 12 "With this ring, I wed", 13 Twisted letter, 21 Printed page's appearance, 22 Chose, with "for", 25 Role player, 26 Major German river, 27 Stories from Chaucer, 28 Superlative ending, 29 Use your brain, 30 Coffee dispensers, 32 Almanac section, 33 Puzzle out, 34 Sprayed from a hydrant, 36 Two-screen cinema, 37 Hosted a banquet, 40 Inanimate object, 41 Nest-egg letters, 46 Hypnotic state, 48 Kept an eye on, 50 Beginning stage, 51 Tour conductor, 52 Just hang around, 53 Lake near Niagara Falls, 54 Turnpike, 55 Cameo shape, 56 Lots of luggage, 57 Money in Spain, 58 Emerald Isle, 59 Cobra's tooth, 60 Owns

A crossword puzzle grid with numbered squares for the 'Newsday Crossword'.

Gasol scores 19 as Grizzlies beat 76ers 104-90

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — A small lineup has helped the Memphis Grizzlies come up big on defense.

Marc Gasol scored 19 points, Mike Conley had 18 points and six assists, and the Grizzlies held another opponent under 100 points, beating the Philadelphia 76ers 104-90 on Tuesday night.

The Grizzlies had five players score in double figures. Courtney Lee had 15 points, reserve Zach Randolph added 14 points and eight rebounds, and Matt Barnes finished with 12 points and 10 boards.

Memphis forced 28 Philadelphia turnovers, scoring 36 points off the miscues. The Grizzlies, who switched to a small lineup six games ago, have held five straight opponents under 100 points after accomplish-

ing it just 11 times in the previous 25 games.

"I thought the level of defensive pressure that we had, our activity was phenomenal, on the ball, weak side," Conley said. "Guys were communicating, trusting each other."

Jahlil Okafor scored 18 points and Hollis Thompson contributed 16 for Philadelphia, which dropped to 1-29 while losing its 11th straight game. Now the 76ers head out for a six-game trip, and they have lost 22 in a row on the road.

There wasn't much booing among the home crowd, which is resigned to Philadelphia's losing ways these days, but one fan seated behind the Grizzlies bench wore a paper bag over his head with a sad face.

The 76ers harped on their offensive miscues in a somber locker room.

"It's hard to win when you turn the ball over that much," Okafor said.

Philadelphia didn't help itself by shooting 65.6 percent (21 for 32) from the free-throw line.

Memphis blew the game open by scoring eight straight points to begin the fourth quarter. Vince Carter drained a pair of 3-pointers and Randolph had a follow layup to put the Grizzlies in front 85-66 with 10:54 left.

The Grizzlies' advantage grew to as many as 20 points, and Philadelphia never got closer than 12 the rest of the way.

"I thought when we didn't settle, we were

effective," Memphis coach David Joerger said. "When we didn't turn it over, we were effective."

Philadelphia trailed 53-47 at the break. But Memphis slowly increased its lead to double digits, eventually taking its largest advantage to that point on Barnes' layup that made it 71-56 with 5:16 left in the third quarter.

It was plenty cushion for Memphis' defense.

"Defensively we've been obviously more confident and we have more trust," Gasol said. "I thought everybody had pressure (on) their man, and when they were driving we were helping. The weak side was in, and once we got the ball swung, everybody closed out and trusted the guy behind you."

STOP AND SHOP

Philadelphia coach Brett Brown said there wasn't much else to say about the game, other than his team's turnovers.

"We can write 28 turnovers for 36 points — it

can be a headline (or) it can be a single sentence — and we can all go and finish our Christmas shopping," he said.

BIG PLAY

Okafor's driving, spinning layup with 2:42 left in the third cut the Grizzlies' lead to 73-64. But Memphis ended the quarter up 77-66 when Conley stripped T.J. McConnell and passed ahead to Lee for an uncontested layup just before the buzzer.

"It's huge because little plays like that are what can make or break a game, can change the momentum of games, can give guys confidence," Conley said. "It was a big moment for us because Philly doesn't quit."

TIP-INS

Grizzlies: Tony Allen returned after sitting out the previous five games due to a knee injury. Allen had one point in 16 minutes. ... Memphis has won six straight in Philadelphia dating to Feb. 11, 2009.

76ers: Kendall Marshall (knee) didn't dress but is expected to play Wednesday at the Bucks with a restriction of 25 minutes. ... Joel Embiid, Philadelphia's 2014 first-round pick who is recovering from his second foot surgery over the summer, worked on shooting before the game.

UP NEXT

Grizzlies: At Washington on Wednesday night.

76ers: At Milwaukee on Wednesday night.

STARS

Continued from Page 8

didn't have a shot in the final 12 minutes of a scoreless first period despite two power plays.

NOTES: Masters and U.S. Open champion Jordan Spieth, who lives in Dallas, dropped the ceremonial first puck. ... Spezza has a nine-game point streak against Chicago going

MAVS

Continued from Page 9

nox Lewis, 50, a dual British and Canadian citizen, got a nice ovation from the crowd when he was introduced and given a Raptors jersey sporting his name and the No. 1.

UP NEXT

Mavericks: Visit the Brooklyn Nets on Wednesday night.

Raptors: Visit the Milwaukee Bucks on Saturday night.

back to his time in Ottawa. ... Blackhawks defenseman Rob Scuderi left the game after getting hit in the face by a deflected puck with 8 minutes remaining. ... The Stars are 5-2-0 against Central Division teams

after having the worst record within the division last year at 8-14-7. The next two games are a home-and-home against another division rival, St. Louis.

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