

# Merry Christmas



**BIG  
SPRING**

# HERALD

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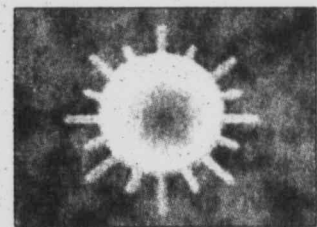
Big Sky — Big Heart — Big Spring

50 CENTS DAILY/\$1.25 WEEKEND

**WEEKEND  
EDITION**

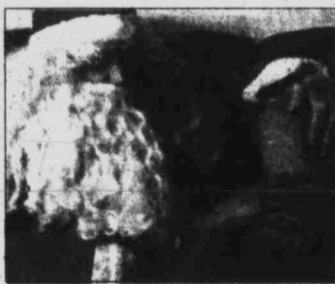
December 25-26, 2004

**WEATHER**



SUNDAY 54°-56° SUNDAY NIGHT 29°-32°

**INSIDE**



The jingle of bells startled her. When he walked through the front door, she turned toward the sound of the voice that called her name.

"I'm looking for Joyce Lynn!" "I'm Joyce," the blind woman answered.

Joyce Lynn Ray had no idea who her daughter had invited into their home on a recent Monday night until the unannounced visitor bounded across the small living room and greeted her with a hug.

Her hand touched his pillow-padded belly.

She lay her cheek against what felt like a full, silky beard.

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This will be the first time that Dick Clark hasn't hosted the New Year's Eve show for ABC since 1972.

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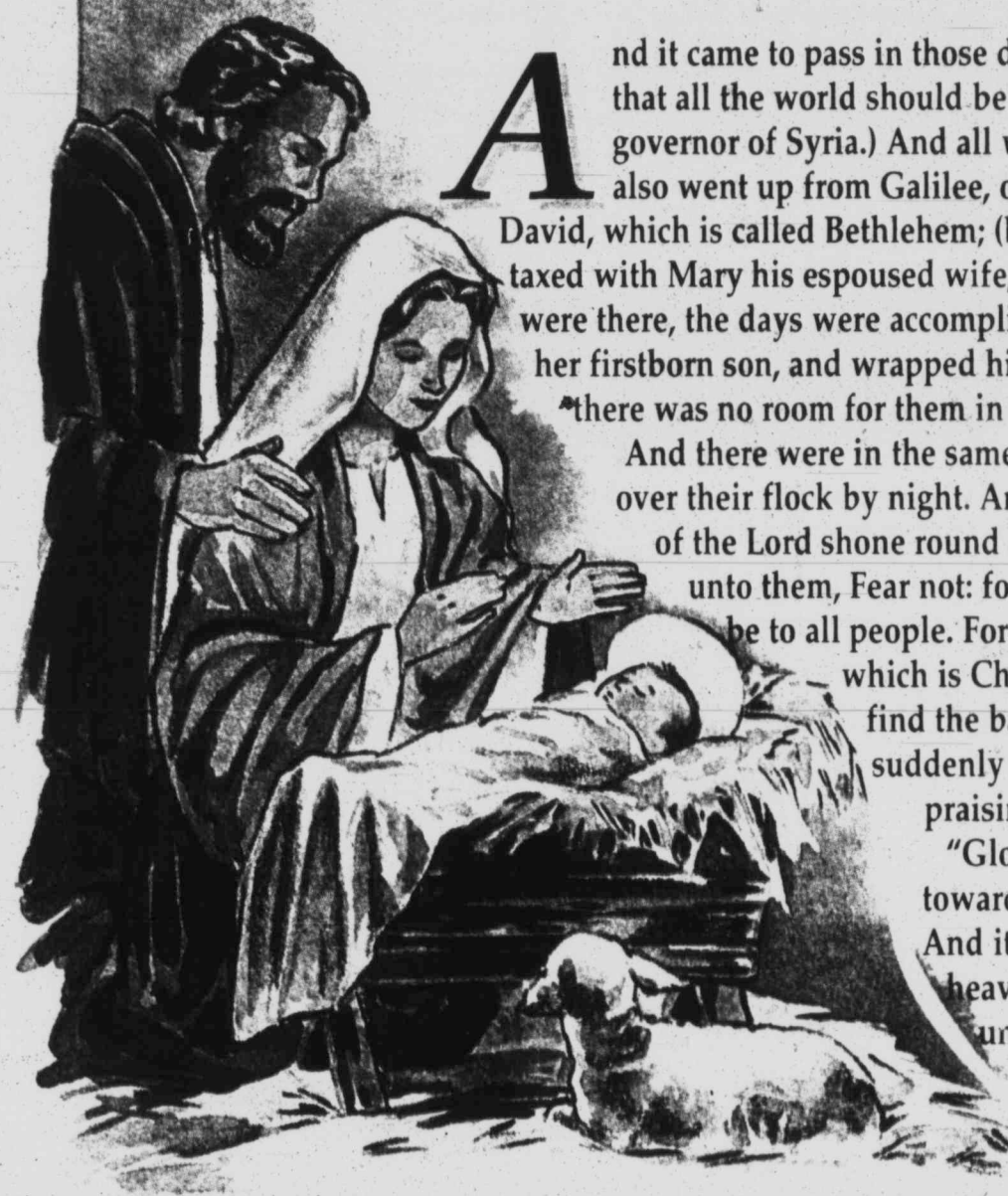
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**Vol. 101, No. 24**

Find us online at:  
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To reach us, please call 263-7331. Office hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. If you miss your paper, please call 263-7335 before 7 p.m. weekdays and from 8 a.m. to noon Sunday.

## The Christmas story



**A**nd it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, everyone into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which

were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them. **Luke 2: 1-20**

## Jail facility on commissioners' agenda

By **THOMAS JENKINS**  
Staff Writer

Howard County commissioners will meet for the last time in 2004 Monday morning to discuss a matter that has haunted the court for more than a year — the need for a new county jail.

According to County Judge Ben Lockhart, two items have been added to Monday's meeting agenda, including discussion and possible action relative to building a new jail facility and possibly the selection of an architectural firm to design the building.

"We're going to discuss the matter again," said Lockhart. "I'm not sure that any deci-



LOCKHART

sions will actually be made on the subject during Monday's meeting, but we thought it would be wise to add possible action to the agenda in case we decided to move ahead with the project in some way.

"There has been some difference of opinions among the commissioners in this matter, especially over the subject of over-building to be able to house prisoners from counties that have overcrowding problems. We'll discuss it and see what happens."

Several presentations have been made to the commissioner's court concerning the construction of a new jail facility over the

past year, including feasibility studies by architects Norris Fletcher and Phil Furqueron.

The common denominator between both studies was simple — any way you cut it, it's going to mean a bond issue for the county to consider.

"Option 1, which is the 160-bed facility expandable to a 212-bed facility including furniture, fees, necessary testing and all of the project construction related costs, you're looking at \$6.6 million," Fletcher told the court during a meeting in October of 2003. "For the 212-bed facility, it's \$7.5 million."

See **COUNTY**, Page 3A



### MERRY CHRISTMAS, VETERANS

Max Winlock of Los Angeles, Calif., places a card on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Christmas Tree. The tree is decorated with Christmas cards for veterans and active-duty military personnel at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, in Washington, D.C.

KRT photo/Chuck Kennedy



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Obituaries

Edna Hopper



Edna Hopper, 92, went to be with her Lord Dec. 21, 2004. She had been residing in McKinney. Funeral services will be at 11 a.m. Monday, Dec. 27, 2004, at Myers & Smith Chapel with Royce Clay officiating. Burial will follow at Trinity Memorial Park. She was a member of 14th and Main Church of Christ.

Edna was born Oct. 17, 1912, to Mr. and Mrs. J. R. Bond in Honey Grove. She was one of five children. The Bond family moved to Big Spring in 1924.

Edna married Lemon Dean Hopper in June 1934. They lived and farmed in the R-Bar community for 20 years. After Mr. Hopper died in January 1959, Edna worked at Carters Furniture, Olan Mills Studio and was "Granny" to many children whom she baby sat.

She is survived by two sons, Jimmy Hopper and his wife, Janet, of Big Spring and Jack Hopper and his wife, Mary Lou of Van Alstyne; two grandsons, Gary Hopper and his wife, Debra of Allen and Denny Hopper and his wife, Lori of Flower Mound; one granddaughter, Sage Kolden and one stepgranddaughter, Lana Churchwell and her husband, Chris, all of Big Spring; great-grandchildren, Cassie, Brittany, Haley and Carl Hopper; stepgreat-grandchildren, Cameron, Madison and Lexi; and several nieces and nephews.

Edna was preceded in death by her husband, parents, brothers, sisters and one granddaughter.

Pallbearers will be Baxter Moore, Willie Nichols, Jimmy Johnson, David Hodnett, Don Adams and Larry Fryar.

The family will receive friends from 4 p.m. until 6 p.m. Sunday at Myers & Smith Funeral Home.

Arrangements are by Myers & Smith Funeral Home. Pay your respects online at [www.myersandsmith.com](http://www.myersandsmith.com).

*Paid obituary*

Francis Mims

Francis Mims, 78, of Cisco died Friday, Dec. 24, 2004, in an Eastland hospital. Her services are pending with Gilbreath Funeral Home of Stanton.



Cassie Wash holds a pecan pie being auctioned during half time at a Forsan High School basketball game. The school's band has been invited to the Independence Day Parade in Washington D.C. and is holding fund-raisers to pay for the trip.

HERALD photo/Bruce Schooler

Take note

□ **SENIOR CITIZEN'S NEW YEAR'S EVE DANCE** Dec. 31 at the Spring City Senior Citizens. Monroe Casey's "Howlers" will be playing from 8:30 p.m. until midnight. There will be free party favors and black-eyed peas and cornbread will be served. Tickets are \$10 per person of \$15 for two people. All senior citizens are invited. There will be no alcohol and no smoking.

□ **REGION 18 SERVICE CENTER** has video and audio-visual material used in the schools available for viewing Jan. 27. The session is 8 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. at the center, which is located at 2811 Leforce Blvd., Midland International Airport. Persons wishing to request preview of the films may call Pam Winn, media supervisor of the education service center, at telephone number 432-567-3260.

□ **CHRIST'S COMMUNITY CHURCH** is looking for infant car seats to be given to needy families. Call Karen at 263-3517 or the church at 263-5683.

□ **A BENEFIT FUND HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED** at Cosden Federal Credit Union for Jeremiah Best, to help with the cost of his cancer treatment. Contributions and prayers are appreciated.

□ **AN ACCOUNT TO BENEFIT TRISTIN RANGEL**, son of Ione and Tim Rangel, has been set up at the Big Spring Government Employees Federal Credit Union, 2204 Gregg St., account No. 529903, to help with medical expenses. He has been diagnosed with acute lymphocytic leukemia and is in a Lubbock hospital.

□ **BUFFALO COUNTRY FINA** is giving away an autographed photograph of Michael Jordan, along with two other Jordan magazine covers, to help with medical costs of 12-year-old Sage Gibson, son of Big Spring Junior High School assistant principal Tommy Gibson, who has been diagnosed with a tumor. For an update on Gibson's condition visit [www.carepages.com/ServeCarePage?cpn=Sagepage&uniq=923947](http://www.carepages.com/ServeCarePage?cpn=Sagepage&uniq=923947). For more information about the Buffalo Fina fund-raiser call 267-5050.

□ **THE FAMILY OF MICHAEL STEADHAM** is in need of help to pay for his funeral expenses. Friends of the family say he had no insurance and died suddenly. An account has been established at the Cosden Federal Credit Union for those wishing to help the family. For more information, call 264-0838 or 264-2600.

□ **THE BIG SPRING WEST TEXAS GIRL SCOUTS COUNCIL SENIOR TROOP 266** is collecting stuffed animals for Scenic Mountain Medical Center's emergency room. A collection box for the stuffed toys will be at Seams-So-Nice in the Big Spring Mall. Or call Laurie Peterson at 432-267-9773.

□ **AN ORIGINAL SUE BAGWELL PAINTING** will be given away in April at the Heritage Museum. Contact the museum at 267-8288 for more details.

□ **FORSAN SCHOOL BAND WILL PERFORM IN WASHINGTON D.C. JULY 4, 2005**, by special invi-

tation, representing Texas. Funds are needed to cover the \$145,000 cost of the trip. Donations are being accepted at account name Forsan Band Trip. Contact Forsan Superintendent Randy Johnson or band directors Jim Rhodes and Jeremy Higgenbotham at 457-2223.

□ **A SAVINGS ACCOUNT TO BENEFIT LOVE FROM HOME** has been established at Citizen's Federal Credit Union. Love From Home is a local effort to provide personal items needed by the soldiers serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Contact the credit union at 267-6373 to contribute funds to offset the cost of postage for the packages mailed to the soldiers.

□ **MANNA RELIEF**, a non-profit ministry that provides glyconutritional supplements to critically ill children, is accepting donations for the program. Call Gene or Robbie Froman at 263-0385.

□ **THE MOBILE MEALS PROGRAM**, which delivers to the elderly and homebound, needs volunteers to deliver meals. If you can spare one hour per week to deliver eight or 10 meals, you are needed. About 85 to 90 meals are prepared, packaged and delivered to recipients within the city limits of Big Spring. If you can volunteer, please call 263-4016 before 3 p.m.

□ **ROAD TO RECOVERY DRIVERS WANTED.** Volunteer drivers are needed to transport cancer patients to and from treatments. If you can spare a few hours each month, please consider volunteering to drive somebody along the Road to Recovery. For more information about volunteering or if you are a cancer patient in need of the service, call La Wanda Hamm, 263-7827.

□ **BIG SPRING AND SURROUNDING** counties are in critical need of foster families. Foster parents are the caretakers for the children in the community who have been abused or neglected. For more information on becoming foster parents or adoptive families, call the Children's Protective Services office at 263-9669.

□ **SPRING TABERNACLE CHURCH**, 1209 Wright, has free food for the area needy. Distribution is scheduled from 10 a.m. to noon every Thursday.

□ **POTTON HOUSE**, 200 Gregg, a restored historic home, is open from 1 p.m. until 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. An admission fee, which includes entry into Heritage Museum, is \$2 for adults and \$1 for children and senior citizens.

□ **HERITAGE MUSEUM**, 510 Scurry, is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. on Saturday. An admission fee, which includes entry into the Potton House, is \$2 for adults and \$1 for children.

□ **HANGAR 25 AIR MUSEUM** is open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. on Saturday and from 1:30 p.m. until 4 p.m. on Sunday.

Bulletin board

If you have items for the Bulletin board, contact the Herald news room at 263-7331 or email [editor@bigspringherald.com](mailto:editor@bigspringherald.com)

MONDAY

• Senior Circle meets at 4 p.m. at Scenic Mountain Medical Center for Sit and Be Fit Chair Aerobics. Those 50 years and older are invited to attend. Call 268-4721.

• Take Off Pounds Sensibly (TOPS) No. 21 meets at 5 p.m. in the Dora Roberts Rehabilitation Center, 306 W. Third, for weigh-in. The meeting begins at 5:30 p.m. Call 1-800-392-8677 or 263-0391 or 263-1758.

• Take Off Pounds Sensibly (TOPS) No. TX 1756 meets at 5:30 p.m. Monday in the 11th and Birdwell Lane Church of Christ. A different program is offered every week, and anyone 7 years old or older is welcome to attend. Please enter through the northwest door. Call 263-2786 for more information.

• Evening Lions Club meets at 6:30 p.m. in La Posada Restaurant.

• Concerned Citizens Council meets at 7 p.m. at 500 S. Main St., in the Dorothy Lamb Meeting Room of the Howard County Library. The public is welcome.

TUESDAY

• Intermediate Line dance classes begin at 9 a.m. in the Spring City Senior Citizen's Center. Call 267-1628.

• Big Spring Rotary Club meets at noon in the Howard College Cactus Room.

• A Stitchin' Time Club meets at 3:30 p.m. at Primitive Baptist Church, 201 E. 24th St. Everyone is invited to learn and share sewing skills, and portable sewing machines are welcome. Call Kay Sikes at 394-4835 for more information.

• The Multiple Sclerosis Support Group meets at 7 p.m. in the College Baptist Church Fellowship Hall, 1105 Birdwell Lane. For more information, call Tracey Pounds at 268-4948.

Weather

Sunday - Mostly sunny. Highs in the mid 50s. Southwest winds 10 to 15 mph.

Sunday night - Mostly clear. Lows near 30.

Monday - Partly cloudy. Highs in the mid 50s.

Monday night - Partly cloudy. Lows in the mid 30s.

Tuesday - Increasing clouds. Highs near 60.

Tuesday night - Mostly cloudy with isolated showers. Lows in the mid 30s.

Wednesday - Mostly cloudy. Highs near 60.

Wednesday night - Partly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of showers. Lows in the mid 30s.

Thursday - Partly cloudy. Highs near 60.

Support groups

SUNDAY

□ Alcoholics Anonymous meets from 11 a.m. to noon at 615 Settles. Open meeting 5-6 p.m.

TUESDAY

□ The Multiple Sclerosis Support Group meets at 7 p.m. the last Tuesday of each month in the College Baptist Church Fellowship Hall, 1005 Birdwell Lane. Call Tracey at 263-4948 for more information.

THURSDAY

□ Narcotics Anonymous, non-smoking discussion meeting, 8-9 p.m., at St. Mary's Episcopal Church, 1001 Goliad.

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

□ The Fibromyalgia Autoimmune Disease Support Group will meet the fourth Thursday of the month at noon in the Dora Roberts Rehabilitation Center beginning in January. Call 263-8273 for more information.

□ Alzheimers Support Group meets at 2 p.m. on the third Thursday of each month at The Texas State Veterans Home, 1809 N. Hwy 87. For more information call Orand Carroll 268-8387.

FRIDAY

□ AA open discussion meeting from noon to 1 p.m. at 605 Settles. Noon open Big Book study meeting, 8-9 p.m.

SATURDAY

□ Open discussion meeting, 615 Settles, noon to 1 p.m. Open podium/speakers meeting 615 Settles 8-9 p.m. Open birthday night, no smoking meeting the last Saturday of each month at 8 p.m.

COUNT

Continued from

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Contact Thomas J. 7331 ext. 2; at citydesk/ald.com

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The Herald is a member of The Big Spring Area Chamber of Commerce, West Texas Press Association, Texas Daily Newspaper Association, Associated Press, Texas Press Association, Inland Press Association, National Newspaper Association, Newspaper Association of America, Small Newspaper Federation, Southern Newspaper Publishers Association and American Newspaper Association.

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BY THE MONTH HOME DELIVERY: Evenings and Sunday, \$8.65 monthly; \$93.42 yearly (includes 10% discount for yearly).  
MAIL SUBSCRIPTIONS: \$12.50 monthly Howard & Martin Counties. \$13.25 elsewhere.





COUNTY

Ambitious road plan moving along, stirring critics

Continued from Page 1A

By JIM VERTUNO  
Associated Press Writer

"We're looking at a sheriff's office administrative area of 6,586 square feet. That involves the sheriff's offices and patrol offices, and that would stay the same with either option one or two. Inmate housing for option one is 20,550 square feet, and option two is 25,560 square feet. That includes the actual cell areas, multi-purpose rooms, all of which are necessary with the detention of inmates. We're looking at option one being 43,509 square feet overall, or option two, which is 49,020 square feet."

In November of 2003 Furqueron also made a presentation to the court, and while he presented no figures regarding the cost of a new facility, he did say Fletcher's figures are on target.

"The price that he quoted for a facility of that size is pretty accurate," said Furqueron. "It's a function of square footage, and you can basically use a price of \$150 per square foot for these kinds of projects. They're not enormously expensive. They cost about the same as a new high school these days."

Monday's agenda also includes a presentation by Chief Deputy Gary Pritchett concerning vehicle bids for the sheriff's office and personnel considerations by County Treasurer Teresa Thomas.

County Road and Bridge Administrator Eddy Jameson is expected to report on pipeline crossings and road maintenance, while County Clerk Donna Wright is expected to set the terms of the court for 2005.

County Auditor Jackie Olson is expected to present invoices, purchase requests and budget amendments to the commissioners, while Furqueron is scheduled to report on renovations that are ongoing at county facilities.

The meeting begins at 10 a.m. Monday in the commissioner's courtroom, located on the second floor of the county courthouse.

Contact Staff Writer  
Thomas Jenkins at 263-7331 ext. 232 or by e-mail at citydesk@bigspringherald.com

AUSTIN — In a state that likes to brag that it's bigger than France, just about everyone agrees plentiful highways are key to commerce and commuting in Texas. Where to build new roads and how to pay for them is another matter.

Republican Gov. Rick Perry announced his vision in 2002 with his Trans-Texas Corridor proposal: build 4,000-plus miles of tollways and railroads that would incorporate oil and gas pipelines, utility and water lines, and even broadband data, over the next 50 years.

With a Texas-sized price tag of \$175 billion the gigantic project and its fair share of opponents, the project was referred to often as a "boondoggle" and drew plenty of chuckles.

But nobody's laughing now. The Texas Transportation Commission on Dec. 16 opened negotiations with the Spain-based consortium Cintra to start the first phase of the project, an 800-mile corridor stretching from Oklahoma to Mexico parallel to the existing Interstate 35.

Although Cintra's proposal is still developing, early plans for the project have envisioned concrete and rail corridors snaking around the state and stretching as wide as 1,200 feet in some areas, with enough room for cars, trucks, trains, pipelines and utility cables. The number of corridors and exactly where they would run has yet to be finalized.

Perry's staff says it would be the first such project in the country, and that the idea has drawn interest from several states, including Virginia, Kansas and Pennsylvania.

"Some thought the Trans-Texas Corridor was a pie-in-the-sky idea that would never see the light of day," said Perry, who has compared his plan to the federal interstate highway system started in the 1950s. "We have seen the future, and it's here today."

But as the plan rumbles along the fast lane, opponents say it could hurt farmers, small towns and the environment. Arguments have pitted regions against each other with worries that moving commercial traffic from existing highways and railroads will hurt local economies.

Even Perry's own GOP opposes the plan. The party platform drafted at last summer's state convention rejected it, citing questions about property rights.

Perry is undeterred. During a trip to Mexico City in June, he envisioned expanding it beyond the border.

"It will change the way transportation infrastructure is built internationally, not just in Texas, not just in the United States," he said. "I think it will be a model for future infrastructure construction in the world."

Supporters say the corridors are needed for the state's economy, particularly NAFTA-driven commerce to and from Mexico. More than \$41.5 billion in annual exports go to Mexico, the state's leading trading partner.

Texas economist Ray Perryman said the corridors could generate about \$135 billion for Texas. Efficient shipping routes for goods and utilities would help the state lure new industry, he said.

"Any time we can do something better, faster and cheaper, it's going to give us an advantage," Perryman said.

The project also could improve safety, said Perry spokesman Robert Black. He said new rail lines will help avoid industrial accidents in large urban areas.

"We have hazardous materials running through our city centers because of a rail system that was built 100 years ago," Black said.

Planners say the project will cost the state little. For the Oklahoma-Mexico corridor, Cintra plans to spend \$6 billion of private money for about 300 miles of four-lane tollway from Dallas to San Antonio and give the state another \$1.2 billion for improvements along the route.

Other long-range projects in Cintra's proposal include freight rail and utility lines and potentially high-speed passenger rail.

The proposal calls for the state to only kick in \$3.5 million to help develop a final plan. In return, Cintra wants to maintain and operate the tollway for the next 50 years.

If drivers were tolled between 10 cents and 20 cents a mile — rates similar to Texas tollways already in use — driving 300 miles would cost anywhere from \$30 to \$60 each way.

Other potential corridors could stretch east-

west from Orange to El Paso, north-south Amarillo to Laredo. Other routes also are being considered.

Texas has traditionally used pay-as-you-go spending that relied on federal highway funding from gasoline taxes. According to Perry's office, Texas gets stiffed on its share of federal funding by hundreds of millions per year.

In 2003, the Legislature allowed the state to use bonds and tolls to finance road construction, and the Cintra deal brings with it a massive infusion of private money.

Those revenue sources will allow Texas to boost road building at a rate that would otherwise require as much as a 50-cent tax increase on a gallon of gas, Black said, which "the people of Texas will not support."

Meanwhile, farmers and environmentalists — say landowners and small towns will pay the greater cost.

The Texas Farm Bureau — generally regarded as an ally of Perry, who grew up on a farm in West Texas — opposes the corridor project.

"They're proposing going primarily through farm and ranch lands," said bureau President Kenneth Dierschke, a cotton farmer from San Angelo.

"If someone comes in and cuts your property in half, that's no good," he

said, promising that farmers will be out in full force at public hearings on the corridor project.

David Stall, the former city manager of Columbus, a town of about 3,800 that sits along Interstate 10 in Colorado County, founded Corridor Watch in opposition to the plan.

Stall estimated that an Orange to El Paso corridor would divert as much as 25 percent of traffic off I-10 and would have a "devastating impact" on Columbus. Bigger cities also have voiced such concerns.

The River of Trade Coalition was formed to defend the traditional NAFTA trade route, from Laredo to Texarkana. The coalition, farmers and small towns all say the state should consider expanding existing highways instead of new construction.

Transportation officials say expanding rights of way along existing highways would be inefficient and expensive, if not impossible in areas where cities like Austin and Temple bump up to the highway.

And while the state may use eminent domain to seize some land, officials promise that property owners will be fairly compensated. A special provision would allow some to negotiate with the state for a share of the revenue generated by the local traffic on the corridor.

Stall, however, warns that Texas might be taking too big a step, warning that if the Cintra deal sounds almost too good to be true, it probably is.

He predicted the price of goods may rise if companies seek to recoup toll costs.

"In the past, we've paid for roads as we've needed them," Stall said. "Now we're talking about selling bonds and introducing private partners who will expect to see a profit. There is no free lunch and no free road."

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Edna Hopper, 92, died Tuesday. Funeral Services will be at 11:00 AM Monday at Myers & Smith Chapel. Burial will be at Trinity Memorial Park. The family will receive friends from 4:00 until 6:00 PM Sunday at Myers & Smith Funeral Home.

Ralph Mendez, Jr., 54, died Wednesday. Vigil Services will be at 4:00 PM Monday at Myers & Smith Chapel.

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EDITORIAL

"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 Editorial Board of the Big Spring Herald unless otherwise indicated.

Susanne Reed  
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Managing Editor

Bill McClellan  
News Editor

# Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus

We take pleasure in answering at once and thus prominently the communication below, expressing at the same time our great gratification that its faithful author is numbered among the friends of The Sun:

"Dear Editor:  
I am 8 years old.  
Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Clause.  
Papa says 'If you see it in the Sun it's so.'  
Please tell me the truth, is there a Santa Claus?  
Virginia O'Hanlon,  
115 West 95th Street"

Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's, are little. In this great universe of ours man is a mere insect, and ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus! It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies. You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Did you every see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that's no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world.

You tear apart the baby's rattle and see what make the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, not even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding.

No Santa Claus! Thank God he lives, and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.

\*\*\*

"Is there a Santa Claus?" is the question Virginia, daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Phillip F. O'Hanlon, put to the editor of the (New York) Sun in September, 1897. Her Letter was received by Edward P. Mitchell, who turned it over to his associate, Francis Pharcelius Church, to answer.

With some reluctance Mr. Church undertook the assignment. The product of his fine nature, mellow wisdom and sound craftsmanship was the editorial article "Is there a Santa Claus?" — the most famous editorial article that has ever been written. It first appeared in the New York Sun in 1897 and has since been produced in every conceivable form, in every quarter of the globe.

The publication of Virginia's question and Francis Pharcelius Church's response is an annual tradition at the Herald. We hope you enjoy it.

# Defending the defense secretary

I'll say it up front: I wasn't thrilled with President Bush's answer to press-conference questions about dumping Donald Rumsfeld. Reportedly, the secretary of defense allowed his staff to use an automatic pen to sign bereavement letters to the families of slain soldiers.

Bush told reporters that Rummy is "a good, decent human being who cares deeply about the military and deeply about the grief war causes." You'd think Rummy was running for Miss Congeniality — not for lead-strategist on two warfronts.

I wasn't thrilled because the president's very personal support of Rumsfeld only feeds the Beltway perception that Bush puts too high a premium on loyalty and too little a premium on effectiveness. Yes, Bush said Rumsfeld has been a good defense secretary, but the president failed to convey to reporters that he understood what Rumsfeld critics believe is at stake: that Americans want to know U.S. troops are going to Iraq in numbers sufficient to win the war and, concerns of Spc. Thomas Wilson about "hillbilly armor" notwithstanding, are sufficiently armed.

Bush could have mentioned that, as to the troop-number question, there is hope. The Pentagon has announced it will increase troop strength in Iraq to 150,000. As for armored vehicles, last week, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Richard Myers told radio talk-show host Tony Snow that the military has ramped up production of armored Humvees.

Bush already had signaled that Rumsfeld isn't going anywhere. No surprise — there are reasons to retain Rummy. No. 1 is Afghanistan, a highly successful and brilliantly executed mission that many predicted would fail. It's easy to call for a public official's ouster after he or she makes a mistake, but it's not necessarily good policy to oust a defense secretary with a solid record as soon as problems arise.

No. 2 is Iraq, for which, contrary to the claims of some critics, there was a plan, but when do war plans get carried out to the letter? Casualties were fewer than expected in the early stages of the war but greater than expected during the occupation. So is Rumsfeld to blame? Or is it the nature of war that the enemy fights back when it can? Let us not forget that if Iraq's January elections come off as planned, the war may well change the Middle East — and, with it, the world.

Sure, there is a public interest in replacing Rumsfeld with a secretary who doesn't own — or have to defend — his department's mistakes. There also, however, is a public interest in retaining a man more likely to oversee victory. As the old saying goes, you don't change horses in midstream.

Cliff May of the pro-war Foundation for the Defense of Democracies noted that it would be wrong to oust Rumsfeld if there is no good answer to the question "Who should replace him, and what policy should replace his?"

Bush would have to pick someone else — preferably someone who would carry out Rumsfeld's plans to transform the U.S. military (and don't expect any of Rummy's many critics to take on that thankless job). I asked Sen. John McCain last week if he'd be interested in the job. He said he

could do more for the military if he heads the Senate Armed Services Committee in two years. Then there is the problem that if the Bushies found someone who would agree to sign on, then they'd have to sell the new guy to Congress.

Also, after the Bernie Kerik fiasco, Bush would have to be a fool to risk nominating someone whose background could derail the nomination. Say what you will, but Rumsfeld knows how to withstand the brutal scrutiny of the public spotlight.

For his part, Rumsfeld at least has attended some 36 town-hall meetings with U.S. troops who were given the opportunity to confront the secretary. If he were afraid of bad news, he would not put himself in that position. It's especially gutsy for Rumsfeld to expose himself to critical troops, considering that this is an age when style crimes and verbal gaffes — for example, he didn't personally sign condolence letters himself, and he gave a less-than-artful answer at a meeting with troops in Kuwait — do more damage to a career than a lost battle.

Meanwhile, both Bush and Rumsfeld should find a dramatic way to assure U.S. troops that they will have the equipment and backing they deserve in combat. I don't want to hear that Rumsfeld is a nice guy. I want to know that Bush and Rumsfeld will do whatever needs to be done.

But I didn't hear that.  
E-mail Debra J. Saunders at [dsaunders@schronicle.com](mailto:dsaunders@schronicle.com). To find out more about Debra J. Saunders, and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate Web page at [www.creators.com](http://www.creators.com).  
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# A mixed bag of holiday greetings

And a Merry Christmas to all, including people who have white Christmas trees decorated entirely with purple balls. Merry Christmas to the Red states and the Blue states, to the R's and D's, and to all the troops stationed in Afghanistan, including the French troops there — *Mais oui*, Chwistmas, y'all.

Merry Christmas to all the people who had to eat bugs on reality shows this year and to all the professional athletes who have *not* gotten into duke-outs (lumps of coal to the rest of you jocks). Merry Christmas to the homeless and the people in the shelters, and especially to those who are feeding the people in the shelters. Season's Best to all the cops who collected for Blue Santa this year, and a Tiny Tim Salute to all the prisoners, including Martha Stewart. Her cell-wing lost the prison's Christmas decorating contest this year — when it rains ...

Here's to all the Americans on both sides of this year's unusually peppy fights over the allowability of religious symbols on public property. This annual battle, in which the American Civil Liberties Union strives once more to make itself as popular as the Grinch, is over the part of the First Amendment that says the government cannot sponsor religion. I always liked what former Gov. Ann Richards said when informed there were demands that the large star on top of the state capitol come down. "Oh, I'd hate to see that happen," she drawled. "This could be the only chance we'll ever have to get three wise men in that building."  
Feliz Navidad to all our immi-



MOLLY IVINS

grants, legal and otherwise — may La MiGra be far away and tamales close at hand. By the way, there are some new legal rights groups that will go after the scum who hire you and then refuse to pay you. Joyeux Noel to all our friends in Canada, and please overlook the pifflebrains who keep insulting you.

Merry Christmas to Tonya Harding and to Nancy Kerrigan, to the Red Sox and to the Cards, and possibly even to George Steinbrenner. Here's to the Texas Legislature, about to convene once more, depriving many a village of its idiot. Here's to John Ashcroft, how we'll miss him — he was so sexy. A Cool Yule to all the jazzmen and their fans. And wishing a warm holiday to all the citizens with rings in their noses who find going out in subzero weather such a trial. And to those with tattoos, whatthehell.

Happy holidays to the sailors and ballroom dancers, the birders and the bingo players, the square dancers, the folklorists, the scrapbook makers, the railroad buffs and everyone else with a harmless passion — we appreciate you all. Here's to the carolers and the altar guild, the vestrymen (vestrypersons?) and the Santas, and to all who volunteer. Here's to everyone who suffered in the Florida hurricanes, including the claims adjusters — may your days be merry and bright.

Festive greetings to the circus folk and the airline attendants trying to get all the Christmas presents into the overhead bin. Here's to all the proud new grandmas and grandpas, and of course, the aunts. Here's to everyone in the emergency room on Christmas Eve: It could be worse — you could be Martha Stewart.

A joyous time to all the cooks, making everything from roast goose to turnip fluff, and especial-

ly to all the kitchen staffs of all the restaurants that are open on Christmas Day. Here's to everyone who got divorced this year and deserves a break — may you even part with a kind thought for your ex.

A special holiday wish for all the Americans in Iraq and all the Iraqis, too — peace on earth. Here's to those who are grieving — isn't "loved one" a horrid expression? — whether it is Joe or Tammy, or even Athena the perfect poodle we mourn.

May Baby Jesus' birthday be mellow for the tense, including the lady who said she shrieked both over having dinner with me and how the toilet flushed on the recent Nation cruise. Me and the toilet — I'm so honored.

Here's to all the racetrack players and cabbies and guys who stop to help fix flat tires. Here's to all the non-Christians, may this day be special for you, as well. To all my brethren and sistren in the newspaper biz, even the editors, and to all the weathermen who report the unidentified flying object on Christmas Eve. Here's to everyone who sent a fruitcake and got one back. Here's to all the salespeople in all the stores who actually made it through without losing it this year, especially in the lingerie departments, where I used to work during the holidays.

And here's to all the rest of us, imperfect though we are. One thing I have learned over the years is that you should go ahead and eat the fudge, because the diet starts next year. And to all, a good night.

To find out more about Molly Ivins and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate web page at [www.creators.com](http://www.creators.com).  
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# Blended

By THERESA W. KRT

SANTA ANA Every year at Aileen Braun makes a pilgrim Garden Grove, see the giant tree that lights iday mood a Island in Newport. Small trip, dend.

The annual fies the bond Braun and her stepdaughter.

Braun, a full except when th spends sum Illinois with h a mother, e all stepfamilie their own hol tion.

Bake cookie: Go Christmas Whatever.

It's OK to i some tradition previous hous a ritual spec blended fam bring everyone

Something thing new, sorr rowed - steppe to make the ex keep the hol being blue.

The kids a because thei holidays are a their biologic are more like



"Thank Michelle for Co Mary Fr for Re: Irene Bu for Co Kevin Ar for Lo For CFC Elizabeth Moore Kristina F Sally Bur Euletta S Patsy An Essie Or Carla G Mary Al John Sc for Pa Phil Fur for Pr "Thank Kevin Al Lonnie I Lisa Bar Lyndel Michael Brandi S Peggy I Debbie Manuel Jesse M Cheryl I Jan For Sharon Nicole Pam W Scott M Tommy Jan Ha Connie Brett Ki from Justin H Gerry T Trey Cx Cindy I Debbk



## Blended families find special challenges during the holidays

By THERESA WALKER  
KRT

SANTA ANA, Calif. — Every year at this time, Aileen Braun's family makes a pilgrimage from Garden Grove, Calif., to see the giant Christmas tree that lights up the holiday mood at Fashion Island in Newport Beach. Small trip, huge dividend.

The annual ritual fortifies the bonds between Braun and her 7-year-old stepdaughter.

Braun, a full-time mom except when the little girl spends summers in Illinois with her biological mother, encourages all stepfamilies to create their own holiday tradition.

Bake cookies together. Go Christmas caroling. Whatever.

It's OK to incorporate some traditions from your previous households. But a ritual special to the blended family helps bring everyone closer.

Something old, something new, something borrowed — stepparents have to make the extra effort to keep the holidays from being blue.

The kids are stressed because they know the holidays are a time when their biological parents are more likely to fight

with each other and with the stepparent, says Braun, who coaches stepfamilies as founder of Stepfamily School.

Typically, the kids don't get to see both biological parents on the holiday. Their loyalties are divided.

To top that off, "They have to spend time with people, often the stepparent's family, that they don't know very well," Braun says. "And they have to pretend to like them."

The biological parents are stressed, feeling guilty and torn between how to make the holidays good for their children and good for their partners. Unless they happen to be the parent left behind without the kids, then they need to figure out how to make the free time good for themselves.

And the stepparents? Their already difficult balancing act threatens to teeter like an overloaded Christmas tree.

"The stepparents are concerned with whether their role in the family is going to be compromised. And it usually is," says Yaffa Balsam, a marriage and family therapist in Los Alamitos who specializes in counseling stepfamilies and runs a

monthly support group. "The stepparents' role can change depending on the mood of the biological parents and the children."

So be prepared to compromise. Be willing to ignore certain things. Be mindful that what matters most is the best interests of the children.

"Examine your expectations," Balsam counsels. "Cut them to the minimum just so it will be successful. It's better to have less activities and more success."

Braun knows, from her own experience and from the people she helps, that the holidays can be the most trying time of the year for stepfamilies.

"The bottom line is that we all want our stepfamily to look, act, feel, taste, smell and be like a biologically-intact family. We think we're putting that together and we're not. So, during the holidays it becomes increasingly stressful."

The adults must accept that it won't be the way everybody wants it to be, and help the kids understand that.

It took an act of desperation for Braun and her husband, Jon DeAugustine, to figure things out.

The conflicts had been

building before the couple said "I do" three years ago.

"There was constant bickering and arguments about how to manage the daughter, how to manage the household, what to do during the holidays."

Braun thought the sense of permanence that comes with getting married would help define her stepmom role. She expected to be taken more seriously, by both her husband and her stepdaughter.

Instead, things got worse.

They saw five different counselors. None helped. Three months into the marriage, Braun made a last-ditch effort when she learned about a class offered by the New York-based Stepfamily Foundation that trained professionals on how to help stepparents.

Braun didn't know how to help herself, let alone others, but she talked her way into it. She and DeAugustine attended together, flying out to the East Coast for the week-end seminar.

The class, along with follow-up counseling, helped them get their household in order after a few months, says Braun, who became a certified



Photo/Rose Palmisano

Kelli Lamb, left, and her father Scott Lamb, right, manage to live a normal life with her stepmother, Karen and her husband, Doug. However the Reynolds are no longer romantically involved.

Stepfamily Foundation coach and consultant, and established Stepfamily School as a West Coast affiliate of the national organization.

So far this month, she's held one seminar on preparing for the holidays and has a second one scheduled this week.

Braun talks a lot about the importance of planning for the holidays: Plan the pickup and drop-off times and locations for exchanging the kids. Plan what the kids are going to wear.

Plan what you are going to eat, and include the kids in determining the holiday meal.

Plan how the kids will

participate in the festivities — who's putting the star on the tree, for instance. Plan a backup plan in case the other biological parent doesn't cooperate.

"It sounds so choreographed, and it is. But it works. Because the alternative is fighting — chaotic anger."

Ideally, Braun says, a co-parenting agreement outlining who gets the kids for what holiday and for how long, already will be set in stone by court decree. Typically, it's not, and that increases the stress.

Nobody knows what's going on, or the parents aren't cooperating.

... "And To All A Good Night!"



In this season of wonder, we wish you lots of harmony and joy at every turn.

Merry Christmas!

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As we count our blessings this holiday season and reflect on the miracle of life, we realize how much ours has been enhanced by knowing and serving all of you.

May you and your loved ones revel in the joy of the season, and please accept our best wishes and gratitude.

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Without their contributions, both monetary and time, we would not have been able to be successful. Thank you, Big Spring and Howard County!

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# His caring calling reaches to the depths of loneliness

By KATHLEEN CARROLL  
KRT

"Hiya doin'? Just calling to see if you are feeling good today!"

That's Peter Salzano, professional listener. Enemy of loneliness. Phone jockey.

"Hey there — you sound great! I can hear you've got a smile on your face! You got plans for Christmas?"

Salzano, 82, is a one-man shipment of holiday cheer for the elderly. From a nondescript gray desk at the Passaic County Senior Citizens office in Wayne, N.J., he calls 70 senior citizens every day, five days a week, 50 weeks a year, as the warm-toned voice of the Telephone Reassurance Program.

Each call works like this: Salzano dials. They talk. He listens. Then he promises to call again, and that's it. Five minutes, tops.

"They get lonesome. They all want to talk to someone, and I'm the guy," he said. "A lot of them ask me when we're going to meet. I just say, 'Our paths will cross someday.'"

The calls are for seniors who ask to be called, and

those who receive dinner delivery through Meals on Wheels — about 860 people total. It's an easy way to keep a friendly line of communication between county social workers and those most likely to need their services.

But this time of year, the job changes. There's a big, red poinsettia plant on Salzano's desk, and a sharper sense of responsibility. His customers, men and women in their 70s and 80s, have lived long, independent lives. And many suffer loneliness, the unkind side effect of outliving their family and friends. The holidays make it harder.

So Salzano, a Pequannock resident who grew up in Paterson, turns up the charm. Who knew he'd be so good at this?

Twenty years ago, he retired after a long career as a traffic manager for a trucking firm. He spent a couple years hanging out at a Saddle Brook pool, swimming and chatting with the other retirees. Then, a friend of a friend heard about this job, and Salzano signed up for the \$17,500-a-year assignment. Why not get paid to talk

all day, instead of giving it away for free?

It has been 12 years, and every call sounds as fresh as the first. He asks about the health problems, remembers the name of the nephew and talks about the old neighborhood.

And he flirts. Just a little.

"It's mostly women I call," he said. "Guys hit the silk (go to bed) early."

They can't see him, these women. But they'd probably like to know that the sweet-talking man on the line dresses sharply, like his idol Frank Sinatra: button-down shirts, V-neck sweaters, pressed trousers and loafers with tassels.

The outfits get a workout: He and his wife, Florence, go out to see big bands and eat Italian dinners at swanky places. They still go for out cocktails and fun.

"A lot of the people I talk to, they talk about their canes and their walkers," he said. "I drink Jack, Florence has two martinis, and the good Lord blesses us."

Katherine Fargnoli would second that blessing. At 82, she lives on her own in a second-floor walkup in Clifton, N.J., and has talked with Salzano for years.

"He's a guardian angel," she said. "It's just so wonderful to get a call. He really sounds so concerned, and that really makes me feel good, because somebody cares."

She'll spend Christmas at a community center for senior citizens, where she spent Thanksgiving. Her parents died when she was a kid, and Fargnoli became a career woman, handling mortgages at a local bank for 25 years. She married at 17, and divorced her husband in her 30s. No kids. Her only

sister died a decade ago. "Being independent gets awfully lonely," she said. "I used to love the holidays. Now I dread them. Everything is so different."

During a recent chilly morning, Salzano made dozens of calls, asking about Thanksgiving and Hanukkah and Christmas. Each one was a fresh rendition of the previous conversation, a fully sincere chat about health and happiness.

He yelled politely into the phone when his listener was hard of hearing, listened with new reactions to a story repeated three times in a single conversation and braved complaints about life by the dozen.

In a series of quick calls, he made sure that Margaret in Wanaque and Ann in Hawthorne and Miguelina in Passaic and Mabel in Ringwood all felt special, listened to and loved.



KRT Photo/Chris Podota  
Peter Salzano and Linda Ploshnick at his desk at the Passaic County Senior Citizens Center in Wayne, N.J.

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**You all have been wonderful!**  
Love,  
Juanez Broughton

## Poetry

### A Christmas Story

By Bernice Reed Jones

<p>Away down in Texas Under West Texas skies A cowboy was round- ing up Cattle on night</p> <p>The old wolf a-howling The stars shining bright And he heard a babe crying Out there in the night</p> <p>The baby kept crying And he looked down to see A young girl a laying With a baby so sweet</p> <p>He picked up the young girl And he picked up the child Wrapping them up In his coat for a while</p> <p>He lived in an old shack By an old cattle shed He laid them down gently In his old wooden bed.</p> <p>A star up in heaven Shone down in the</p>	<p>night Her golden hair tan- gled On his pillow of white</p> <p>The cattle were lowing And hoped he could keep The golden haired lady And the baby so sweet</p> <p>The old wolf a-howling The baby awake But little sweet baby No crying he make</p> <p>The wolf brought red berries Laying them on the floor His gift for the baby The child he adored</p> <p>And early next morn- ing The berries still lay The cowboy awakened To a bright Christmas day</p> <p>The beautiful berries So red and so bright A gift for the baby Born on Christmas Eve night</p>
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# Texas

By KELLEY SH...  
Associated Pre...

AUSTIN - Carrolling on Te sets, but nearby grabbing a pi action.

Directors Rodriguez an Linklater made in the past Burnt Orange ions, an ups for-profit ver works with U Texas film stu its first pictur many more.

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Austin city c working on sin gies. A city stu in August peg nomic impact visual media

at \$360 million MovieMaker just named Au location in the live and mal Houston was N

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Texas gives ers some sales tions, but othe "literally thro at people to g come there," said.

In Louisiana unlike Texas state incom moviemakers investor tax ( payroll crec Mexico also p

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# Texas popular movie spot, but other states beckon

By **KELLEY SHANNON**

Associated Press Writer

AUSTIN - Cameras keep rolling on Texas movie sets, but nearby states are grabbing a piece of the action.

Directors Robert Rodriguez and Richard Linklater made films here in the past year. And Burnt Orange Productions, an upstart Austin for-profit venture that works with University of Texas film students, shot its first picture and plans many more.

Film industry insiders, though, warn that the state must work to retain the film business that blossomed over the last decade or risk losing it to nearby states where financial incentives are attracting producers.

"Filmmakers tend to follow filmmakers. If there's a hot spot, they're going. New Orleans is a hot spot right now," said Tom Copeland, director of the Texas Film Commission.

The commission is looking at new ways to promote the Texas movie-making infrastructure. Specific proposals are expected in the 2005 state legislative session.

Austin city officials are working on similar strategies. A city study released in August pegged the economic impact of film and visual media on the city at \$360 million annually. MovieMaker magazine just named Austin the top location in the nation to live and make movies. Houston was No. 10.

Filmmakers often praise the diversity of locations near Austin, and the fact that crews, equipment and studios are already in the city.

Texas gives moviemakers some sales tax exemptions, but other states are "literally throwing money at people to get them to come there," Copeland said.

In Louisiana — where unlike Texas there is a state income tax — moviemakers can get investor tax credits and payroll credits. New Mexico also provides tax

incentives and recently announced funding to train film technicians.

Texas film industry experts worry about losing the state's all-important crew base — the behind-the-scenes people who tend to sets, operate cameras and work in production.

"Our crews are leaving and going to work on films in Louisiana and New Mexico. I hear it almost every single day," said Carolyn Pfeiffer, president and chief executive of Burnt Orange Productions.

Producer Elizabeth Avellan, who makes movies in Austin with her husband, Rodriguez, said professional, hard-working crew members in Texas are a big attraction. Rarely, she said, do they encounter "whining" or "drama" on crews.

"Drama takes a lot of time, and time is money in the movie business," Avellan said. "When you have crews that are professional and know what they're doing, you get it done faster."

The couple's Texas-made films include the "Spykids" movies. Last spring they filmed "Sin City" in the area, and they are working on "The Adventures of Shark Boy and Lava Girl," set for release June 10.

Rodriguez and Avellan

live in Austin, where they operate their Troublemaker Studios, and shoot 80 percent or more of their movies in Texas. They don't intend to be lured to neighboring states, Ayellan said.

But Texas should try to persuade filmmakers not to flee, she said, praising the bipartisan movie industry support shown by Texas leaders.

A total of \$304.7 million from 51 projects flowed into film production in Texas this year by early December, Copeland said. State and local officials are well aware of that economic impact.

Republican Gov. Rick Perry joined governors from the three other most populous states this year

to urge Congress to stop filmmakers from making movies in other countries because it is so much cheaper. The governors asked Congress to allow immediate expensing of production costs for some U.S.-made films.

Every production dollar generates from \$2 to \$5 in revenues in a local economy, the governors said.

In the Austin area, Burnt Orange Productions has plans to become a larger part of the economy.

Burnt Orange, working with the University of Texas Film Institute, wants to produce eight to 10 commercially viable, feature-length films in its first three years, in the budget range of \$500,000

to \$3 million per picture. Almost all the movies will be filmed in Central Texas.

About 30 students — some paid, but most earning internship credits — worked on the recently filmed Burnt Orange movie "Dot," a dark teenage thriller set in Connecticut but made in Austin. The film will be

finished in March, but so far has no distributor or release date.

Another inspiration for young filmmakers is the presence of big-name directors and producers in Texas, Copeland said. Projects by Rodriguez, Linklater and Mike Judge were among the state's major productions this past year.

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# U.S. election voted top news story of 2004, outpolling Iraq war

By DAVID CRARY  
AP National Writer

NEW YORK — The Iraq war and terrorism dominated the 2004 list of top stories in an annual Associated Press survey, but it was President Bush's election victory that editors and news directors chose as the biggest story of the year.

The war itself was the No. 2 choice, and four other stories in the Top 10 involved either Iraq or terrorist attacks.

The election, in which Bush defeated Democrat John Kerry and the Republicans strengthened their hold on both chambers in Congress, received 137 first-place votes out of 234 ballots cast. Iraq, voted the No. 1 story in both 2002 and 2003, was runner-up this year, with 79 first place votes.

Here are 2004's top 10 stories, as voted by AP members:

**1. U.S. ELECTION:** After vanquishing Howard Dean, John Edwards and other Democratic rivals, Kerry seemed to have a strong chance of ousting Bush. But the Massachusetts senator struggled to explain his stance on Iraq, underestimated the sting of negative ads and — in the end — narrowly lost the pivotal swing state of Ohio after a campaign in which Bush, over and over, insisted he was best qualified to be commander in chief at a time of complex challenges to national security.

**2. IRAQ:** Throughout 2004, Iraq was a striking mix of bloody turmoil and tantalizing promise. Anti-American insurgents wreaked havoc with car bombings and videotaped beheadings of hostages; the death toll for U.S. military forces passed 1,300, and the toll of Iraqi civilians was many times higher. Yet Iraq's interim leaders doggedly proceeded with plans for national elections early in the new year.

**3. FLORIDA HURRICANES:** Four major hurricanes — Charley, Frances, Ivan and Jeanne — devastated Florida and other southern states in August and September, killing 117 people in Florida, destroying 2,500 homes and causing more than \$22 billion in insured losses. Not since 1886 had one state been hit by four hurricanes in one season.

**4. ABU GHRAIB SCANDAL:** Photographs came to light showing U.S. military guards at the Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad forcing naked Iraqi detainees to pose in humiliating positions. Prosecutions ensued, and the scandal fueled anti-American sentiment in the Muslim world.

**5. SEPT. 11 REPORT:** After painstaking research and dramatic public hearings, the commission formed to investigate the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, issued its report.

It concluded that America's leaders failed to grasp the gravity of terrorist threats before Sept. 11 and recommended creation of a national intelligence director to oversee civilian and military intelligence agencies.

**6. GAY MARRIAGE:** From coast to coast, gay marriage was a volatile topic throughout the year. Massachusetts became the first state to have legal, same-sex weddings, and local officials in several places — including San Francisco and Portland, Ore. — also wed gay and lesbian couples before courts intervened.

However, each time the issue reached the ballot — in 13 states in all — voters decisively approved constitutional amendments banning gay marriage.

**7. ARAFAT DIES:** For three decades, Yasser Arafat was a hero to most of his fellow Palestinians but considered unreliable — or worse — by leaders in the West and Israel. His death in November, at age 75, triggered emotional mourning among Palestinians but also sparked hopes of a breakthrough in efforts to end



KRT Photo by David Swanson/Philadelphia Inquirer  
**U.S. Marine Pfc. Eric Aaron Ayon tries to drive a disabled Humvee in Iraq. Ayon was killed three days later at the same intersection.**

their long, bloody conflict with Israel.

**8. REAGAN DIES:** together at least briefly in

Alzheimer's disease had kept Ronald Reagan out of the public eye for a decade. But when the nation's 40th president died in June, at 93, Americans responded with an outpouring of affection and respect.

**9. RUSSIAN SCHOOL SEIZURE:** Even in a world grown all too accustomed to terrorism, the drama in the Russian town of Belsan was shocking because children were so clearly prime targets. A band of terrorists, believed led by a Chechen warlord, took more than 1,000 people hostage at a school in September. When the seizure ended, amid explosions and gunfire, more than 330 hostages had been killed

— most of them children.

**10. MADRID BOMBINGS:** Another stunning terrorist strike occurred in March, when 190 people were killed after bombs hidden in backpacks exploded on four commuter trains during Madrid's morning rush hour. Soon after the attack, which was blamed on Islamic militants, angry voters unseated Spain's pro-American conservative government in favor of the Socialist Party, which promptly withdrew Spanish troops from Iraq.



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KRT Photo Andrew Cuttraro/St. Louis Post-Dispatch  
**President George W. Bush listens as Sen. John Kerry speaks during the presidential debates.**

Massachusetts state of Ohio after a campaign in which Bush, over and over, insisted he was best qualified to be commander in chief at a time of complex challenges to national security.

Throughout 2004, Iraq was a striking mix of bloody turmoil and tantalizing promise. Anti-American insurgents wreaked havoc with car bombings and videotaped beheadings of hostages; the death toll for U.S. military forces passed 1,300, and the toll of Iraqi civilians was many times higher. Yet Iraq's interim leaders doggedly proceeded with plans for national elections early in the new year.

Four major hurricanes — Charley,

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Major events re  
cow disease, or b  
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**2003**  
— Dec. 23: U.S.  
Department annou  
pected appearance  
disease in the Unit  
Japan and South Ko  
beef imports. Some  
eventually follow, in  
Australia and Mexic  
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**2004**  
— Jan. 6: DNA te  
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Canada.  
— Feb. 4: Intern  
convened by U.S. A  
Department calls fo  
tions on cattle feed  
are probably undisc  
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government says th  
cause for alarm.  
— Feb. 14: FDA i  
mends U.S. govern  
testing for mad cow  
evaluate any risk to  
sumers.  
— Feb. 19: Agric  
Department econo  
beef bans imposed  
50 nations will pus  
prices down 10 pe  
cent in the second  
year.  
— March 3: USD  
general says govern  
begun a criminal in  
whether records ma  
falsified in the U.S.  
cow disease. Mexic  
its ban on U.S. bee  
— March 15: Off  
USDA will expand it  
mad cow disease t  
221,000 animals c  
year to 18 months,  
number tested in 2  
— March 26: Un  
mally notifies tradin  
U.S. beef is safe to  
— June 1: USDA  
expanded national  
cow disease.  
— June 25: Agri  
say two animals in  
States test inconcl  
liminary screening  
cow disease.  
— June 30: Offic  
up tests showed ni  
cow disease.  
— July 9: Govern  
metics makes the  
use brain and spin  
from older cattle in  
sprays and other p  
— Oct. 23: U.S.  
negotiators agree 1  
month-old ban on l  
exports to Japan. J  
would allow resum  
Japanese beef exp  
United States.  
— Nov. 18: Agri  
say they may have  
ond case of mad c  
the United States.  
— Nov. 23: Offic  
up test showed no  
cow disease in the  
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# Great year for beef producers despite mad cow scares

By **BETSY BLANEY**

Associated Press Writer  
**LUBBOCK**

Consumers continued to scarf up steaks and burgers in 2004 even in the aftermath of the country's first-ever mad cow case and Texas beef producers weathered temporary price drops at auctions and commodity markets. "This has been a humdinger of a year considering we started out with the announcement of a (mad cow) case that certainly set the markets on a rollercoaster and one that had breathtaking drops for a bit," said Matt Brockman, spokesman for the Fort Worth-based Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association.

Mad cow disease, which attacks an animal's nervous system, is also known as bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or BSE. People who eat food contaminated with mad cow can contract a rare disease that is nearly always fatal, variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease.

In Texas, the nation's largest beef producing state, and elsewhere, consumers' fears about mad cow were allayed by an expanded national testing program and movement toward a national cattle identification system, Brockman said.

Those steps, combined with a protein-heavy regime in the popular Atkins and South Beach

diets, kept beef consumption high. Domestic beef sales in 2004 are projected to be the largest on record at \$70 billion, up \$8 billion from 2003.

The growth came despite heavier than normal rainfall that hurt some crops, but healed long-parched rangelands, which will encourage ranchers to expand herds. "The moisture has certainly turned the corner," Brockman said. "I can't imagine many producers saying the drought hasn't been broken, and '05 is one we look forward to with great anticipation."

But the big news of 2004 for cattle producers was mad cow. In the only confirmed U.S. case, a Canadian-born Holstein was found to have been infected in Washington state in December 2003. That led to more than 40 countries cutting off imports of U.S. beef and the slaughter of more than 700 additional cattle in Washington state, Oregon and Idaho as a precaution.

Japan, one of the country's largest export markets, tentatively agreed in October to begin accepting U.S. beef again but only animals younger than 21 months. Imports of U.S. beef products from older animals could resume after July 2005.

Exports account for about \$3.8 billion of America's \$40 billion a year beef production

industry.

Jim McAdams, a fourth-generation cattle rancher southeast of San Antonio and president-elect of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, said while the export business fell, Americans ate more beef — making 2004 possible one of the best for producers in years.

"The great story there is that despite all the publicity we have had about mad cow and three inconclusive tests that turned out to be negative, consumer confidence has actually increased," he said.

About 221,000 cattle will be tested in an 18-month

surveillance program that began in June as part of the federal department's increased scrutiny of the beef supply. So far, tests have been conducted on more than 121,000 animals, mainly high-risk animals: those that died on the farm, had trouble walking or showed signs of nerve damage.

The screenings led to follow-up tests on three cows this year, including one as recent as November, but none showed signs of mad cow disease. No beef from the animals got into the food supply, U.S. agriculture officials said.

McAdams cited beef

association surveys in which consumers' trust in the nation's beef supply climbed slightly from 89 percent in the spring to 91 percent this fall, despite news about the inconclusive tests.

Some of the nation's biggest buyers of beef — McDonald's and Wal-Mart — want more than tests to ensure a safe supply, and government and industry representatives have been working for about 10 years to develop a nationwide tracking system that would help find animals infected with mad cow or other diseases quicker.

Currently, there is no national system.

Major events related to mad cow disease, or bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), in the United States:

**2003**

- Dec. 23: U.S. Agriculture Department announces first suspected appearance of mad cow disease in the United States. Japan and South Korea halt U.S. beef imports. Some 50 countries eventually follow, including Australia and Mexico. Canada follows with a limited ban.
- Jan. 6: DNA tests confirm that cow diagnosed with first U.S. case of mad cow was born in Canada.
- Feb. 4: International panel convened by U.S. Agriculture Department calls for more restrictions on cattle feed, saying there are probably undiscovered mad cow cases. The next day, U.S. government says there is no cause for alarm.
- Feb. 14: FDA panel recommends U.S. government step up testing for mad cow disease to evaluate any risk to American consumers.
- Feb. 19: Agriculture Department economist says U.S. beef bans imposed by more than 50 nations will push U.S. retail prices down 10 percent to 15 percent in the second half of the year.
- March 3: USDA inspector general says government has begun a criminal investigation into whether records may have been falsified in the U.S. case of mad cow disease. Mexico partially lifts its ban on U.S. beef imports.
- March 15: Officials say USDA will expand its testing for mad cow disease to more than 221,000 animals over the next year to 18 months, 10 times the number tested in 2003.
- March 26: United States formally notifies trading partners that U.S. beef is safe to eat.
- June 1: USDA begins expanded national testing for mad cow disease.
- June 25: Agriculture officials say two animals in the United States test inconclusive in a preliminary screening test for mad cow disease.
- June 30: Officials say follow-up tests showed no sign of mad cow disease.
- July 9: Government tells cosmetics makers they can no longer use brain and spinal cord tissue from older cattle in lipstick, hair sprays and other products.
- Oct. 23: U.S. and Japanese negotiators agree to ease a 10-month-old ban on U.S. beef exports to Japan. Agreement would allow resumption of Japanese beef exports to the United States.
- Dec. 25: Pending a final round of inspections, Taiwan agrees to resume U.S. beef imports.
- Nov. 18: Agriculture officials say they may have found a second case of mad cow disease in the United States.
- Nov. 23: Officials say follow-up test showed no sign of mad cow disease in the animal.

—The Associated Press

*Happy Holidays!*



R to L: Rachel, Jill, Rina, Dr. Carrasco, Joanne, Carol.  
Front: Karla

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**December 2004**

<p><b>December 20 • Monday</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Games - 2:00 pm</li> <li>* Sit &amp; Be Fit - 4:00 pm</li> </ul>	
<p><b>December 21 • Tuesday</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Mall Walking - 8:00 am</li> <li>* Supper Club "Cowboy's" - 5:30 pm</li> <li>* R.S.V.P. Christmas Council Party Gale's - 3:00 pm</li> </ul>	
<p><b>December 22 • Wednesday</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Stretch &amp; Tone - 11:00 am</li> <li>* Senior Appreciation Day - 11:30 am</li> </ul>	
<p><b>December 23 • Thursday</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Mall Walking - 8:00 am</li> <li>* Coffee @ Gale's - 10:00 am</li> </ul>	
<p><b>December 24 • Friday</b></p> <p>Open</p>	
<p><b>December 25 • Saturday</b></p> <p>Christmas Holiday - <i>Merry Christmas!</i></p>	
<p><b>December 26 • Sunday</b></p> <p>Open</p>	
<p><b>December 27 • Monday</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* No Sit &amp; Be Fit Today!</li> <li>* Senior Circle Office Closed</li> </ul>	
<p><b>December 28 • Tuesday</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Mall Walking - 8:00 am</li> <li>* Senior Circle Office Closed</li> </ul>	
<p><b>December 29 • Wednesday</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* No Stretch &amp; Tone Today!</li> <li>* Senior Appreciation Day - 11:30 am</li> <li>* Senior Circle Office Closed</li> </ul>	
<p><b>December 30 • Thursday</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Mall Walking - 8:00 am</li> <li>* Coffee @ Gale's - 10:00 am</li> </ul>	

**No Child Birth Classes  
In December**

<p>Volunteer/Sr. Circle Director <b>*Anita Cline,</b> 268-4721</p>	<p>Free Pregnancy Testing Every Day 9:00 am - 6:00 pm OB Department, 2nd Floor, Results In 4 Minutes</p>	<p>Road To Recovery (Transportation For Cancer Patients)</p>
<p>Senior Circle Office Hours: <b>Tues.-Thurs.</b> 10:00 am - 4:00 pm</p>	<p>Donna Mills, RN, Director Of Women's Services OB Dept., 268-4550</p>	<p><b>LaWanda Ham,</b> 263-7827</p>

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### Billboard's year-end music charts

By The Associated Press

#### Year-end Billboard music charts

##### Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Albums

1. "Confessions," Usher. LaFace/Zomba.
2. "The Diary of Alicia Keys," Alicia Keys. J/RMG.
3. "The Black Album," Jay-Z. Roc-a-Fella/Def Jam/IDJMG.
4. "The College Dropout," Kanye West. Roc-a-Fella/Def Jam/IDJMG.

##### Hot Dance Music — Club Play Singles

1. "Took My Life," Vernessa Mitchell. JYM.
2. "Stoned (Deep Dish Remix)," Dido. Arista/RMG.
3. "Not in Love (D. Aude Minge Binge, & R.H. Vission Mixes)," Enrique Iglesias (feat. Kelis). Interscope.
4. "Nothing Fails (Remixes)," Madonna. Maverick/Warner Bros.
5. "A Thousand Beautiful Things (Rauhofer, G&D, Bimbo Jones)," Annie Lennox. J/RMG.
6. "Burning," Robbie Rivera & Axwell (feat. Suzan Brittan). Benz Street/Episode/Waako.
7. "Push the Feeling On (Rosabel & JCA Mixes)," Nightcrawlers. Tommy Boy Silver Label/Tommy Boy.
8. "O.G. B... (Hamel/Smitty/H&G/Blow-Up/Orange Factory)," Esthero. Reprise.
9. "Slow," Kylie Minogue. Capitol.
10. "Naughty Girl (Calderone & Quayle Remix)," Beyonce. Columbia.

##### Hot Rap Singles

1. "Lean Back," Terror Squad. SRC/Universal/UMRG.
2. "Slow Motion," Juvenile (feat. Soulja Slim). Cash Money/UMRG.
3. "Freek-a-Leek," Petey Pablo. Jive/Zomba.
4. "Topsy," J-Kwon. So So Def/Zomba.
5. "Slow Jamz," Twista (feat. Kanye West & Jamie Foxx). Atlantic.

##### Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Artists

1. Usher
2. Alicia Keys
3. R. Kelly
4. Kanye West
5. Jay-Z

##### Hot Latin Tracks

1. "Mas Que Tu Amigo," Marco Antonio Solis. Fonovisa.
2. "Te Quise Tanto," Paulina Rubio. Universal Latino.
3. "Cuidarte el Alma," Chayanne. Sony Discos.
4. "Y Todo Queda En Nada," Ricky Martin. Sony Discos.

6. "Overnight Celebrity," Twista. Atlantic.
7. "Dirt Off Your Shoulder," Jay-Z. Roc-a-Fella/Def Jam/IDJMG.
8. "Splash Waterfalls," Ludacris. Disturbing tha Peace/Def Jam South/IDJMG.
9. "Sunshine," Lil' Flip (feat. Lea). Sucka Free/Columbia/SUM.
10. "The Way You Move," OutKast (feat. Sleepy Brown). LaFace/Zomba.

##### Hot Latin Albums

1. "La Historia Continua...," Marco Antonio Solis. Fonovisa/UG.
2. "Za Za Za," Grupo Climax. Musart/Balboa.
3. "Amar Sin Mentiras," Marc Anthony. Sony Discos.
4. "Tributo Al Amor," Los Temerarios. Fonovisa/UG.
5. "Veintisiete," Los Temerarios. Fonovisa/UG.
6. "Pau-Latina," Paulina Rubio. Universal Latino.
7. "En Vivo Desde Chicago," Grupo Montez de Durango. Disa.
8. "Lo Que Te Conte Mientras Te Hacias La Dormida," La Oreja de Van Gogh. Sony Discos.
9. "De Viaje," Sin Bandera. Sony Discos.
10. "La Historia," A.B. Quintanilla III & Kumbia Kings. EMI Latin.

##### Hot Contemporary Jazz Albums

1. "Come Away With Me," Norah Jones. Blue Note.
2. "Twentysomething,"

##### Top Latin Albums

1. "Romance of the Violin," Joshua Bell. Sony Classical/Sony Music.
2. Soundtrack: "Master and Commander." Decca/Universal Classics Group.
3. "Vivaldi's Cello," Yo-Yo Ma With the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra & Ton Koopman. Sony Classical/Sony Music.
4. "American Angels," Anonymous 4. Harmonia Mundi.
5. "Sentimento," Andrea Bocelli. Philips/Universal Classics Group.
6. "Live in Dublin," Andre Rieu. Denon.

##### Top Contemporary Christian Albums

1. "The Beautiful Letdown," Switchfoot. Columbia/Sparrow/EMICMG.
2. "Casting Crowns," Casting Crowns. Beach Street/Reunion/Provident.
3. "Wow Hits 2004," Various Artists. Provident/Word-Curb/Sparrow/EMI Christian/EMICMG.
4. Soundtrack: "The Passion of the Christ." Integrity/Word-Curb.
5. "Undone," MercyMe. INO/Word-Curb.
6. "Payable on Death," P.O.D. Atlantic/Word-Curb.
7. "Wire," Third Day. Essential/Provident.
8. "Stacie Orrico," Stacie Orrico. Forefront/Virgin/EMICMG.
9. "Worship Together: I Could Sing of Your Love Forever," Various Artists. EMI Special Markets/Time Life/EMICMG.
10. "Carried Me: The Worship Project," Jeremy Camp. BEC/EMICMG.

##### Top Soundtracks

1. "Tupac: Resurrection"
2. "The Cheetah Girls (EP)"
3. "Shrek 2"
4. "Spider-Man 2"
5. "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King"

##### Top Gospel Albums

1. "Wow Gospel 2004," Various Artists. Word/EMICMG/Verity/Zomba.
2. "Throne Room," CeCe Winans. PureSprings Gospel/INO/Sony Music.
3. Soundtrack: "The Fighting Temptations." Music World/Columbia/Sony Music.
4. "Somethin' Bout Love," Fred Hammond. Verity/Jive/Zomba.
5. "Gotta Have Gospel!," Various Artists. Integrity Gospel/Gospo Centric/Epic/Sony Music.
6. "Smokie Norful: Limited Edition (EP)," Smokie Norful. EMI Gospel.

7. "Sacred Arias: Special Edition," Andrea Bocelli. Philips/Universal Classics Group.
8. "Yo-Yo Ma Plays Ennio Morricone," Yo-Yo Ma With Roma Sinfonietta Orchestra (Morricone). Sony Classical/Sony Music.
9. "By Request," Renee Fleming. Decca/Universal Classics Group.
10. "The Salieri Album," Cecilia Bartoli. Decca/Universal Classics Group.

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4. "Somethin' Bout Love," Fred Hammond. Verity/Jive/Zomba.
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Varitek re-

**World Championship**  
NEW YORK  
Jason Varitek is to stay with Red Sox as deal with Cardinals, a game of chairs am stops.

Varitek a \$40 million contract World Series on Red Sox. is to be Friday, a knowledge of negotiations sale of anor Cut lo Anaheim. Eckstein a \$10.25 million year contract NL Cardinals.

Boston's shortstop s luring Edg from St Anaheim t Monday to Orlando Ca helped the sweep St. L World Serie Also, Galarraga minor league with the Mets. The first base one home 400.

**Colonials straight in**

MIAMI ( Thompson pointers ar points to Colonials win ove Internation George W eighth str George (8-1) used early in half to ta lead.

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**Maryland American**

COLLEGE Md. (AP Gilchrist points and 0 second-h gave the 66-48 lead. Medley ha for No. 24 2), which American, Jason Th 14 points fo (5-3), whos winning st The Ter won 12 in American when the first series.

**Virginia p**

record to C H. LOTTESV (AP) — J. driving la seconds r overtime 25 Cavali win o Marymou first game ing for ex Elton B 25 points (8-1), w Singletary including pointer in Matthew 27 points (7-3).



### IN BRIEF

#### Varitek re-signs with World Champions

NEW YORK (AP) — Jason Varitek decided to stay with the Boston Red Sox and David Eckstein agreed to a deal with the St. Louis Cardinals, completing a game of musical chairs among shortstops.

Varitek agreed to a \$40 million, four-year contract with the World Series champion Red Sox, a deal that is to be announced Friday, a lawyer with knowledge of the negotiations said on condition of anonymity.

Cut loose by Anaheim Monday, Eckstein agreed to a \$10.25 million, three-year contract with the NL champion Cardinals.

Boston started the shortstop switches by luring Edgar Renteria from St. Louis. Anaheim then agreed Monday to a deal with Orlando Cabrera, who helped the Red Sox sweep St. Louis in the World Series.

Also, Andres Galarraga agreed to a minor league contract with the New York Mets. The 43-year-old first baseman needs one home run to reach 400.

#### Colonials win eighth straight in Florida

MIAMI (AP) — T.J. Thompson hit six 3-pointers and scored 25 points to lead the Colonials to an 81-71 win over Florida International. It was George Washington's eighth straight victory.

George Washington (8-1) used a 10-1 run early in the second half to take a 44-35 lead.

Ivan Almonte had 22 points and 13 rebounds for the Golden Panthers (5-5), who dropped to 0-13 all-time against ranked teams.

#### Maryland blows out American by 21

COLLEGE PARK, Md. (AP) — John Gilchrist scored 20 points and fueled a 16-0 second-half run that gave the Terrapins a 66-48 lead. Nik Caner-Medley had 16 points for No. 24 Maryland (7-2), which defeated American, 82-61.

Jason Thomas scored 14 points for the Eagles (5-3), whose five-game winning streak ended.

The Terrapins have won 12 in a row over American since 1926, when the Eagles won the first game of the series.

#### Virginia pushes its record to 8-1

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. (AP) — J.R. Reynolds' driving layup with 1.5 seconds remaining in overtime gave the No. 25 Cavaliers a 79-77 win over Loyola Marymount in their first game since breaking for exams Dec. 8.

Elton Brown scored 25 points for Virginia (8-1), while Sean Singletary added 12, including a key 3-pointer in overtime.

Matthew Knight had 27 points for the Lions (7-3).

## Dallas, Washington have lots to prove as year nears end

By JAIME ARON

AP Sports Writer  
IRVING — Just because the Dallas Cowboys and Washington Redskins are both 5-9, don't automatically dismiss their matchup Sunday as a meaningless game. Grab a cup of eggnog and consider some of the things that will be on the line.

Technically, both teams are still in the playoff chase, something the Redskins are actually taking seriously. To get one of the two wild cards, they must climb past four teams with better records and six more with the same record, including Dallas.

"Every game from here on out is going to be like

a playoff game for us," Washington linebacker Marcus Washington said.

— This is the second-to-last chance for players on both teams to prove themselves. It could be a free agent-to-be looking to pad his resume with more stats and highlights, a rookie trying to move up the depth chart or a fringe player hoping to show he belongs in the league.

"I want to make sure I have a job," Dallas center Al Johnson said. "A true competitor is going to play to win no matter what the situation is."

— The Cowboys and Redskins also have been known to go together like the Hatfields and the

McCoys. It's easy to see how that might be forgotten considering Dallas has won the last three meetings and 13 of 14.

"At some point you have to start winning games for it to be a rivalry," Washington coach Joe Gibbs said.

Perhaps Gibbs returning to Texas Stadium for the first time since the 1992 opener will stir up the kind of feelings best expressed by Tom Landry in the classic commercial that depicted him "surrounded by ... Redskins."

— There's also the quirky saga of Dallas' starting quarterback Vinny Testaverde, who could have one eye looking over his shoulder to

see when coach Bill Parcells will send in backup Tony Romo for the first snap of his two-year career, the other eye scanning his offensive linemen to make sure everyone really wants to be out there against a tough defense the day after Christmas.

"They're basically protecting you from being in harm's way," Testaverde said. "When you reach a certain point in the year, you're worried a little more about the players and make sure they're on top of their game."

OK, so maybe it's not as hype-worthy as NFL schedulers hoped when they put the second Gibbs-Parcells matchup

in the late-afternoon slot on the final Sunday of 2004. (The first, by the way, was featured on a Monday night back in September.)

But this game does offer some genuine intrigue.

The Redskins are playing better than they have all season, an indication Gibbs is finally starting to get things going in the right direction. They've won two of three, with the only exception a tight loss against Philadelphia.

The offense has improved since Patrick Ramsey took over five games ago and the defense is third best in the NFL at stopping the

See COWBOYS, Page 2B

## Texans prepare for tough Jags' defense

By MARK LONG

AP Sports Writer  
JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Houston and Jacksonville are playing for much different things Sunday.

The Jaguars need a victory to keep pace in the crowded AFC wild-card picture and possibly even clinch a playoff spot.

And the Texans? "We're playing for the same thing a guy playing basketball on the playground plays for — pride and respect," defensive lineman Seth Payne said. "Above and beyond all that, none of us have guaranteed contracts for next season, so we're playing so we don't have to be selling insurance next year."

The Texans (6-8) also could play spoiler against the Jaguars (8-6), who are vying for their first post-season berth since 1999.

"We've put ourselves in a position where we don't have to worry about everyone else," quarterback Byron Leftwich said. "We just need to play good football and continue to win games."

But winning might not be enough.

Although there is a scenario in which Baltimore, Jacksonville, Denver and Buffalo could finish tied for the final wild-card spot and the Jaguars would win the tiebreaker, a more probable — and much simpler — calculation for the Jags would be to win out and have the Ravens lose at Pittsburgh on Sunday.

The Jags also can clinch a playoff spot Sunday with a victory and losses by the Ravens, Broncos and Bills.

"We recognize there are different things that would benefit us, but I think the biggest thing that benefits us is to focus on winning Sunday and then beyond that continuing to win," coach Jack Del Rio said.

Del Rio said he doesn't plan on checking the scoreboard and joked that maybe he should try to ban updates from the Ravens-Steelers game.

That won't happen, and some players acknowledged that they might peek at the score of "the other game" during timeouts or between quarters. And who could blame them? After all, this is a team that has been virtually out of the playoff hunt at this point in each of the last four years.

"When you have an opportunity to move on, you have to take advan-

tage of it," Leftwich said. "This time last year, we weren't even close. To be in it, it's a whole lot more fun than where we were last year."

The Texans also have improved from last season — they swept Tennessee, beat Jacksonville in late October and played Indianapolis close two weeks ago — but not enough to make the post-season in their third year.

"I think we still have an awful lot to play for," coach Dom Capers said. "I look at our division record and I look at the chance for us to play for a non-losing season. And to me, as a professional, people remember how you finish. ... I don't think there is any attitude here that we don't have much to play for."

The Texans showed it by hammering Chicago on the road last week.

The Jags were even more impressive, winning at Green Bay in sub-freezing temperature.

Now the Jags hope to avoid a letdown.

They are coming off a huge win on the road and have postseason aspirations. It's the same position they were in when they traveled to Houston two months ago. Jacksonville had just won at Indy for the first time in team history and pulled even with the Colts atop the AFC South.

But then Houston rolled up 369 yards against Jacksonville and might have had a big lead had it not been for two costly fumbles. The gaffes gave the Jags a chance to tie it in the final minute, but Demarcus Faggins intercepted a pass from Leftwich and returned it 43 yards for a score and a 20-6 victory.

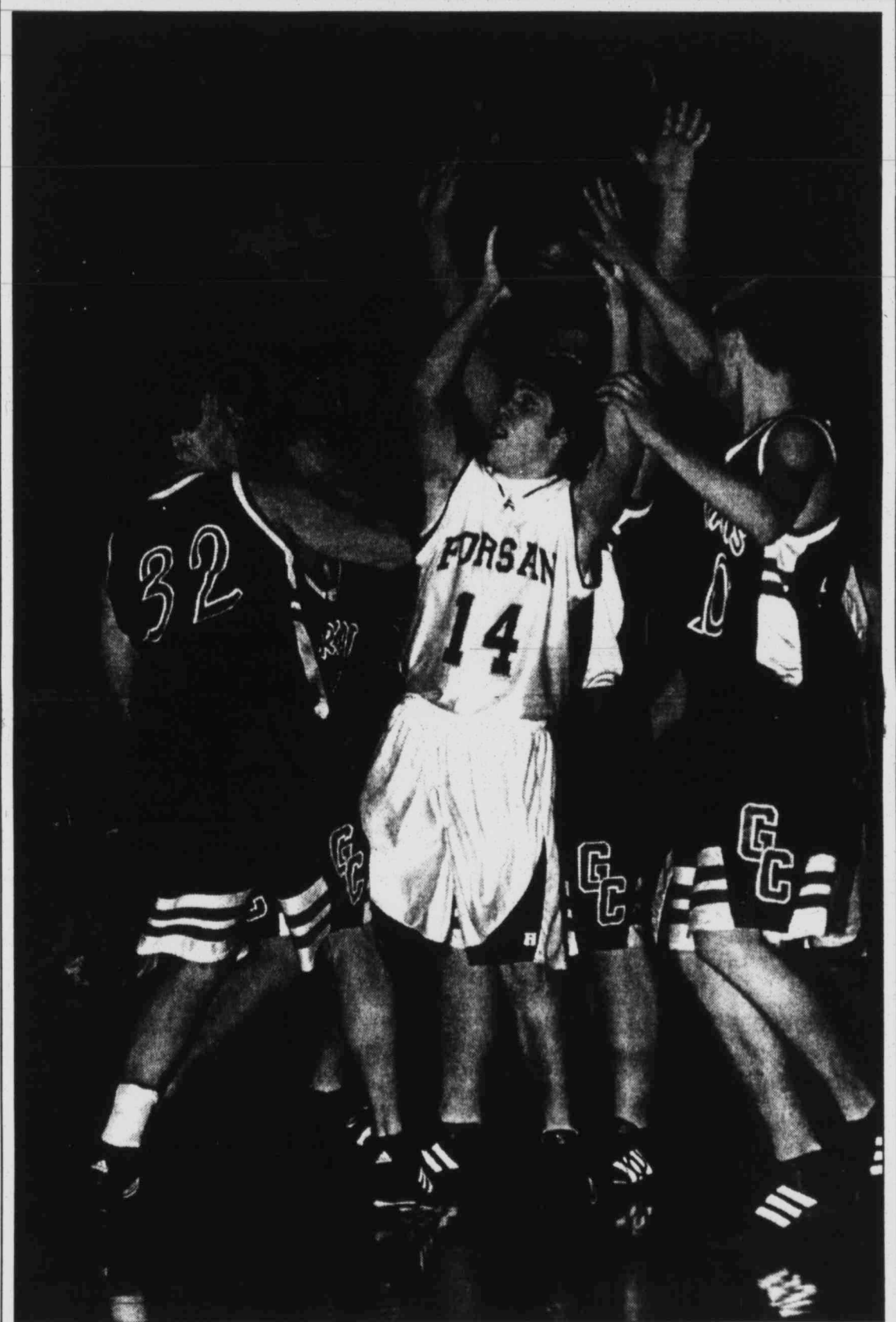
"We're playing a lot better now," Jags safety Deon Grant said. "We've turned the tables around."

Now the Jaguars have a chance of making the playoffs, which seemed a long shot when they lost three in a row and fell to 6-6.

But they still might need help to get it done.

Leftwich said he planned to call Pittsburgh quarterback Ben Roethlisberger this week. The two former Mid-American Conference rivals talk regularly, but Leftwich said he won't say anything about needing the Steelers' assistance against the Ravens.

"I'm not going to jinx it," Leftwich said.



HERALD photo/Bruce Schooler  
Forsan's Clay Kuykendall goes up for a shot in the lane against Garden City Dec. 17. The Buffaloes will compete in the Sterling City Tournament Dec. 28-30.

## Battle of OSU hits San Antonio

By JEFF LATZKE

Associated Press Writer  
STILLWATER, Okla. — Growing up in Ohio, Sam Mayes had a childhood full of dreams about playing for Ohio State. That all changed when the words "walk on" slapped him in the face.

With a chip on his shoulder, Mayes spent the last five years waiting for his chance to show the Buckeyes he idolized what they were missing. Just when it looked like he wouldn't get that opportunity, the Alamo Bowl made its selection.

Mayes' Oklahoma State team will play the 24th-ranked Buckeyes on Wednesday in a game Mayes is sure to remember.

"For the last five years, I've been looking at that schedule thinking they've got to pop up sooner or later," Mayes said. "I'm going to get my chance, and it's the last game of my career."

Mayes, 22, was born in North Carolina, but his football foundations and style came in Ohio.

"Football in Ohio and Pennsylvania is like Texas, but more serious," said Mayes, a 6-foot-3, 330-pound offensive guard. "It is crazy. Little kids are six months old and they're throwing footballs in the crib. I'm dead serious."

"You don't do anything unless you play football in Ohio. That's how I grew up and everyone wants to play for Ohio State. Everyone wants to represent the state."

Mayes played high-school football at Austintown (Ohio) Fitch High School and was an honorable mention all-state selection his senior year. He went to several Ohio State football camps in hopes of earning a scholarship. That's where his Ohio State dreams ended and others began.

"At the end of the camp,

I was told I would be a preferred walk-on," Mayes said. "I was like, 'Yeah, that's gonna happen.' I have a lot of schools offering me scholarships and I'm going to walk on here?"

"It kind of hurt my feelings a little bit."

So, the same kid who met with Eddie George and Orlando Pace in the Buckeyes' locker room instead went to the school where Barry Sanders and Thurman Thomas started their careers.

Once in Stillwater, Mayes developed into the sturdiest lineman on the nation's eighth-best rushing attack. Behind Mayes — a third-team All-American selection — and his fellow linemen, the Cowboys averaged 245 yards on the ground this season.

"I couldn't be happier with my decision," Mayes said.

See ALAMO, Page 2B

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COWBOYS

Continued from Page 1B

run. It got another boost last week with the return of linebacker LaVar Arrington.

Keeping this roll going against the Cowboys would certainly thrill Redskins fans, starting with the most important one, owner Daniel Snyder. Remember, Gibbs' predecessor Steve Spurrier vowed to beat Dallas for Snyder the day he was hired, then gave him a game ball when it happened.

Washington came close in the first meeting, getting into position for a tying field goal in the closing seconds when receiver Rod Gardner was tackled in bounds; time ran out because the Redskins couldn't stop the clock. The Cowboys nearly blew a late 11-point lead, but won 21-18.

"Dallas has always been a big deal here," Gibbs

said. "We would like to play well against them and we haven't. We have to somehow find a way to get that turned around."

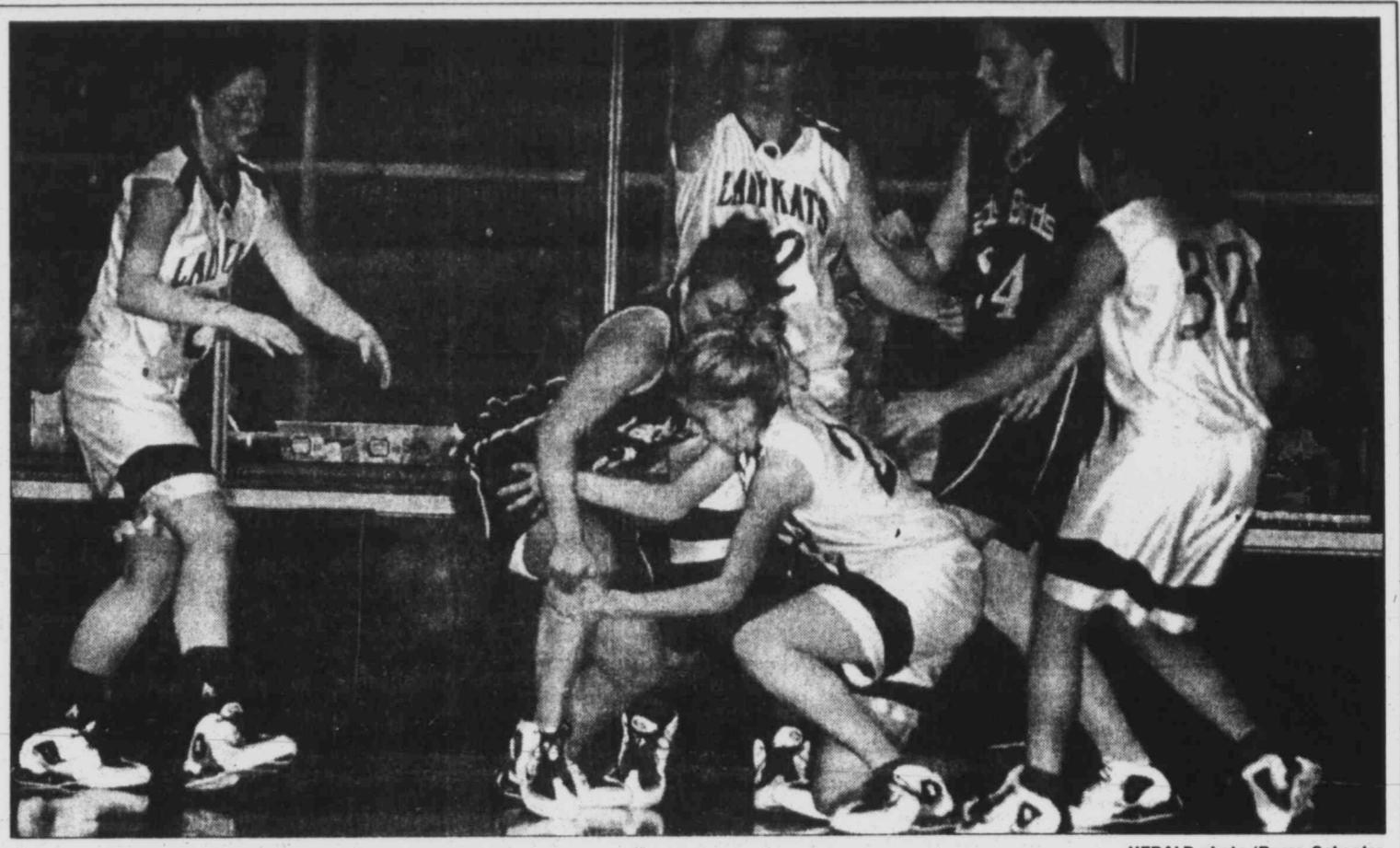
Parcells can understand the frustration. He's been trying to turn around the Cowboys' season since October.

Dallas was building toward a December run until losing at home to New Orleans.

The Cowboys rebounded last Sunday with a tight game against Philadelphia, but the loss guaranteed a losing season — their fourth in five years and the first for Parcells in his second season with a team.

He still has an outside chance of keeping alive his streak of making the playoffs in every Year 2. Even if it happens, he'll consider this season a disappointment.

"I feel like we certainly had our opportunities," he said. "One hundred percent of the teams in the NFC have had that."



Garden City senior Lauren Plagens, center in white, dives in for a loose ball in a tournament earlier this month, while her teammates close in for assistance. The Garden City boy's and girl's teams will take part in the Big Lake Tournament Dec. 27-29.

HERALD photo/Bruce Schooler

Pacers' O'Neal gets suspension reduced

By LARRY NEUMEISTER

Associated Press/Writer NEW YORK

Jermaine O'Neal will be back on the court on Christmas for the Indiana Pacers' rematch against the Detroit Pistons.

He'll soon be back in federal court, too.

A judge cleared the way for O'Neal to return Thursday, upholding an arbitrator's decision to reduce the Indiana forward's suspension for fighting with fans during the Nov. 19 Pacers-Pistons brawl.

Judge George B. Daniels ruled from the bench after listening to arguments by lawyers for the NBA and the players'

union and watching a brief videotape of O'Neal punching a fan during the brawl.

The union asked Daniels to temporarily uphold an arbitrator's decision Wednesday to knock 10 games off the 25-game suspension imposed on O'Neal by NBA commissioner David Stern. The ruling allows O'Neal to play while the judge considers a lawsuit brought by the NBA challenging arbitrator Roger Kaplan's authority to hear the grievance.

"While we disagree with the court's decision today and expect that ultimately Judge Daniels will find that the arbitrator had no

authority in this matter, we will, of course, abide by the ruling of the court," NBA deputy commissioner Russ Granik said.

"Since Jermaine O'Neal has already served 15 games of his suspension, he will be eligible to participate in the Pacers'

games, at least until the next court hearing date set for Dec. 30."

Daniels said he ruled before deciding the merits of the case because to make O'Neal serve a punishment that may not be upheld could have "irre-

versible consequences for the player, the player's family, the league itself."

"We're a union attorney," Kessler said. "It's the right thing to do." Jeffrey Mishkin, O'Neal's lawyer for the arbitration, suggested that the arbitrator would threaten authority to conduct during a hearing ultimately, the image.

"The purpose of the commission is to get it over the top," Mishkin said. "He said the commissioner needed to show powers and show we have our house."

He also suggested O'Neal make it more secure Saturday's game. Mishkin de-

comment after the league did not participate in the bargaining between the union and the league over behavior solely hands. Thursday's fight with fan considered on-the-ity solely un-

ALAMO

Continued from Page 1B

Mayes said he expects Ohio State to bring the same smashmouth running style that the Cowboys take into the Alamo Bowl.

"The thing I don't think they're ready for is the fact that we're going to play same football down here at a much faster pace," Mayes said.

"I think it's going to be a little bit of a challenge for them to deal with some of the speed we have. It's going to be

difficult for some of the smaller guys to deal with some of the size they have."

But matchups could pale to Mayes' pure desire to play — and beat — the Buckeyes. The senior said the only thing better than beating Ohio State would be winning the national championship.

"I'm going to completely cut everything loose," Mayes said. "I will be running my mouth and doing more things that you've never seen me do on a football field."

"It's going to be a great time."

YEAR-END MILLION DOLLAR PRICE BLOWOUT

Advertisement for Bob Brock's car sale. It features a grid of car listings under various categories: Program Cars, Vans & SUVs; Cars; Small Pickups; Vans; Motorcycle; SUV's; 1/2 Ton Pickups; and 3/4 Tons & 1 Ton Pickups. Each listing includes the car model, year, color, and price (both 'Was' and 'Now'). Many items are marked as 'SOLD'. The ad concludes with the slogan 'Where Your Trade-In Is Worth More!!! (Since 1966)' and the dealership name 'Bob Brock Ford • Lincoln • Mercury • Nissan' with address '500 W. 4th' and phone '267-7424'.

O'NEAL

Continued from F

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O'NEAL

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versible consequences for the player, the team, the player's future and the league itself."

"We're delighted," union attorney Jeffrey Kessler said. "It's the fair and right thing to do."

Jeffrey Mishkin, a lawyer for the league, suggested that upholding the arbitrator's ruling would threaten Stern's authority to control conduct during a game and, ultimately, the league's image.

"The purpose is to give the commissioner authority over the game," Mishkin said during arguments Thursday.

He said the commissioner needed to protect his powers and show "that we have our house in order." He also suggested that letting O'Neal play might make it more difficult to provide security at Saturday's game.

Mishkin declined to comment after the ruling.

The league did not participate in the arbitration, contending the collective bargaining agreement between the league and the union leaves punishment for on-the-court behavior solely in Stern's hands.

Thursday's arguments focused on whether the fight with fans was considered on-the-court activity solely under Stern's disciplinary control or

something else that would permit an arbitrator to review the penalty. The judge left that issue and others to be decided when he hears arguments next Thursday.

Kessler said the brawl was "one massive riot incident that was not part of the game." Mishkin countered that the activity occurred during a televised game that had not yet been suspended.

"The purpose is to give the commissioner authority over the game. It's irrelevant whether your toe is 2 inches over the boundary line," he said.

In a 28-page decision Wednesday, Kaplan reduced O'Neal's suspension and upheld Ron Artest's season-long suspension, along with those of Stephen Jackson (30 games) and Anthony Johnson (five games).

During the 12-minute brawl, Artest sprinted into the stands and confronted a fan he believed had thrown a drink at him. Jackson also went into the stands and exchanged punches with fans, while O'Neal and Johnson punched fans who came onto the court.

Five Pacers players and seven fans face criminal charges.

The union had asked for substantial reductions in the penalties during an arbitration hearing at a Manhattan law office.

"I'm extremely happy," O'Neal said. "It's been a tough process. Now I can

play the game I love so much. I'm ready, but I have to find a way to bottle up the energy and use it in a good way. I have to make sure we win games, and when Stephen Jackson gets back, we can win a championship."

In reducing O'Neal's ban, Kaplan cited O'Neal's "character, community involvement and citizenship" while also deeming Stern's punishment "excessive."

"This should not be viewed as condoning what O'Neal did. He did punch a fan. The 15-game suspension is a significant penalty. The NBA cannot tolerate such conduct," Kaplan wrote in his decision, a copy of which was obtained by The Associated Press.

O'Neal served the 15th game of his suspension Wednesday night.

Indiana has lost 10 of 15 games since the brawl, using patchwork lineups in an effort to make up for the loss of three of the team's five leading scorers.

Even before the suspension reduction was upheld, Indiana coach Rick Carlisle said O'Neal would start against Detroit.

"I think it will be great for Jermaine to be back on the floor," Carlisle said. "That will be important to him and certainly to our fans. When you're without your best player for a long time, it's tough."

Dallas' Singleton placed on injured reserve

IRVING (AP) — The Dallas Cowboys put starting strongside linebacker Al Singleton on injured reserve Thursday because of an injury in his midsection that's kept him out the past 1 1/2 games.

Coach Bill Parcells has described the problem as

being in Singleton's groin and abdomen.

Regardless of whether time or surgery is needed, there's not enough time left this season for him to get back onto the field.

Scott Shanle made his first NFL start in Singleton's place last

weekend.

He's expected to do so again Sunday against the Washington Redskins.

The Cowboys did not immediately replace Singleton on the roster.

Dallas will play against Washington Sunday in a battle of division rivals.

BCS: just annual horror show

By JIM LITKE

AP Sports Columnist  
We're at that point in college football's annual B-movie horror classic when the monster staggers back to its feet for the umpteenth time.

It's already been shot, stabbed and electrocuted, folded, mutilated and spindled, drowned, fricasseed and, most recently, flattened by a steamroller. But in the next moment, with the monster rising to its full height yet again, comes the awful realization: The BCS lives!

Dr. Frankenstein had nothing on the suits who brought the Bowl Championship Series to life.

Like his creation, theirs also was a bad idea that's only gotten worse over time.

It has turned college presidents into hypocrites, forced coaches to become beggars and turned off more fans than anything since Roseanne Barr put on a football uniform for the movie "Backfield in Motion."

But the BCS isn't going anywhere. Bloodied but unbowed by the news this week that The Associated Press would not allow its poll to be used in determining its rankings, Big East commissioner and former BCS boss Mike Tranghese promised yet another reincarnation after the organization meets in April.

"The BCS is here and it's going to continue. But the BCS is a target for all the playoff proponents. When something like this happens, they jump on it. They look at

something like this as a crack. They don't understand the strong position of our presidents," he said.

Tranghese is right about that last point. A playoff system could incorporate the major bowls and bring in more money for everyone involved and is favored by a majority of the coaches, players and fans.

The real reason the college presidents won't go along is simple: They want to protect the six major conferences, four bowls and the TV network that control the BCS and decide how to divvy up the take. But the reason they offer is that a playoff would harm their student-athletes' chances at academic success.

Please. Even an old-school authority like Penn State coach Joe Paterno isn't buying that line anymore.

"I think the college presidents allowing the BCS thing is a real, real shame," he said recently. "Whenever the talk turns to having some kind of a playoff, they say you can't miss classes and yet we've already got NCAA playoffs (in every other college sport) and everything else."

"I mean, who's kidding who?" Paterno added. "They've got to try to figure out a way to get rid of it and the hypocrisy of money, money, money."

It's small consolation, but the BCS is already hard at work — not at legislating itself out of existence, or ending the hypocrisy, mind you, but on the "money, money, money" part. The organization just signed a four-

year deal worth \$320 million with Fox for the broadcast rights to the Fiesta, Orange and Sugar bowls from 2007-10 and the national title game from 2007-09.

And credibility has never been high on the BCS' to-do list.

Never mind that the AP poll comprised one-third of the formula the BCS used to draw up this season's rankings — the coaches' poll and six computers made up the remaining two-thirds — or that the writers and broadcasters were the only ones who made their votes public.

The coaches, many of whom have contracts triggering handsome bonuses for appearances in BCS bowls — have already indicated a willingness to stay on, and keeping the computers in the fold won't require anything more than a steady supply of electricity.

"We're just going to have to put our heads together," Tranghese said, "and come up with an alternative way of picking the teams for the 1-2 game."

Small wonder Tranghese was undaunted. Since they hijacked the postseason in 1998, the BCS and its old-boy network have had to revise the formula four times and the front-running scheme for alternative No. 5 is creation of a selection committee, similar to the one used for the NCAA's basketball tournament.

The major difference, of course, is that after the basketball committee finishes seeding the teams, the championship is decided on the court.

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# Big Spring celebrates Christmas

**B**ig Spring does Christmas right each year, with a variety of events and celebrations that provide entertainment and good will for community members.

From the Gingerbread House Decorating event, sponsored by Gale's Sweet Shoppe, where, in the top right photo, Hannah Beauchamp intently constructed her house, to the *Big Spring Herald's* annual Christmas Parade, seen in the top left and middle photos, Big Spring celebrates Christmas.

Other annual events include the annual Potton House Red Dress Tea, where, photo lower left, Linda Berry and Jo Ann Forrest served homemade delicacies and sparkling punch and the community theater production of "Oliver," lower right photo.

Other holiday traditions included the Drive Thru Nativity presented by about 175-200 members of the Community of Hope Church of the Nazarene, the annual Big Spring Symphony Tour of Homes as well as this year's performance of Handel's "Messiah," and the canterbury Christmas Bazaar.

The Festival of Lights at Comanche Trail Park remains open until Dec. 31, and thanks to the generous nature of the community, more than 600 children received presents through the angel adoption and toy programs. In all, a truly Merry Christmas.

Herald photos/Thomas Jenkins, Kendra Wiss and Marsha Sturdivant



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## ► Wedding

### Smith, Currie exchange vows

Krystal Danielle Smith and Jerry Otis Currie II of Smithville exchanged wedding vows at 2:30 p.m. Nov. 4, 2004, in the Bastrop County Courthouse Annex with Justice of the Peace Wayne Smith presiding.

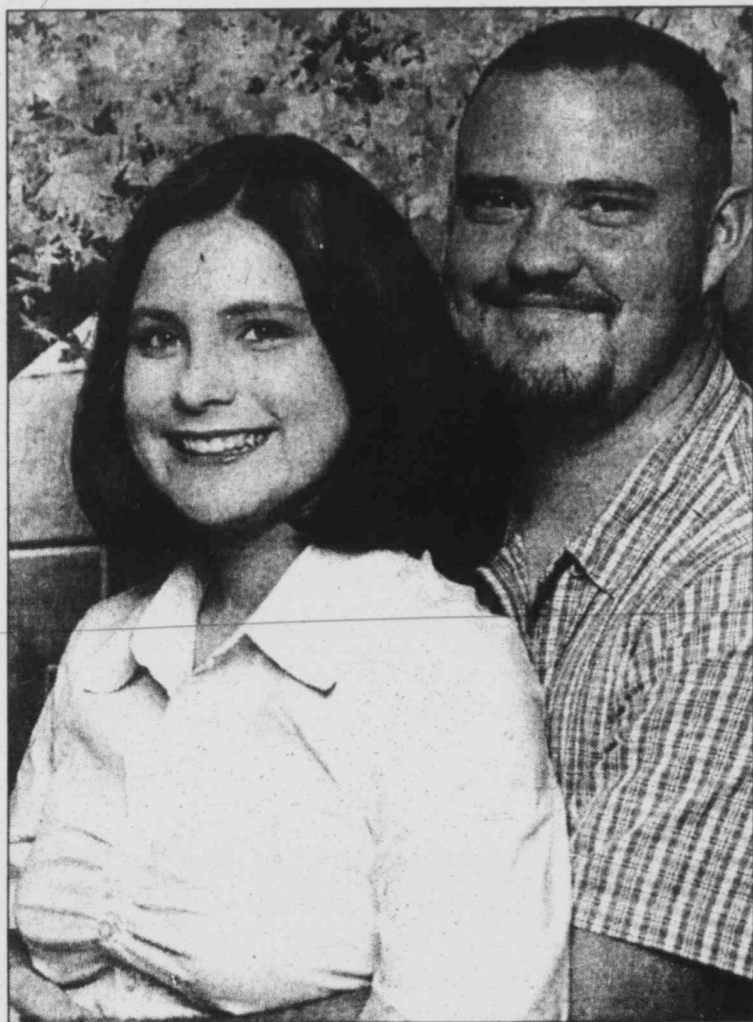
The bride is the daughter of Cyndi Billington and the granddaughter of David and Fran Jansch.

The groom is the son of Jerry and Connie Currie of Smithville. He is the grandson of Geneva and the late Cecil Daughtrey of Smithville, James Currie of Houston and the late Nellie Currie Hamby of Nacadoches.

The bride was given in marriage by her father-in-law, Jerry Currie and her grandfather, David Jansch. She chose a white, satin ballroom style dress with a chiffon overlay that had white roses on it.

The matron of honor was Connie Currie.

The best man was Jerry Currie.



Mr. and Mrs. Jerry Otis Currie II

A small reception was held Saturday, Nov. 6, 2004, at 7:30 p.m. at 2 Wheels Bar in Paige.

Music was provided by the groom's cousin, Steve Daughtrey.

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## ► Who's Who

### Angelo State University

Angelo State University conferred 360 bachelor's and master's degrees upon 358 graduates during 2004 Fall commencement exercises Dec. 18 in San Angelo.

Students from Big Spring who received degrees include Stuart Len Beall, who earned a bachelor of business administration degree; Connie Solley Booth, who earned a bachelor of arts degree; Michael Allen Hadley, who earned a bachelor of science degree; Debra Lou Jackson, who earned a bachelor of science in nursing degree; Vickie I. Perry, who earned a bachelor of science in nursing degree; Derek William Wash, who earned a bachelor of business administration, cum laude; and

Jeremy Blake, who earned a bachelor of business administration.

From Coahoma, Derek W. Ward, received a bachelor of science degree.

### Lubbock Christian University

Jarred Layne Rowden of Coahoma was one of 201 graduates who participated in commencement exercise for Lubbock Christian University on Dec. 11.

Rowden graduated with a bachelor of business administration degree.

Lubbock Christian University is a liberal arts institution of higher learning dedicated to providing a quality education in a Christian environment. LCU was among only six Texas schools to be named in the John Templeton Foundation

Honor Roll of Character Building Universities. LCU offers 43 bachelor's degree programs and eight master's degrees with an enrollment of almost 2000 students.

In recent years LCU has enjoyed national recognition. The sports program has produced 12 national team championships, more than a dozen individual champions and over 300 All-American performances. In addition to athletics, the Students In Free enterprise team has won four international championships.

### Lamar University

Sharon Diane Baird received a bachelor's degrees in general studies from Lamar University during winter commencement Dec. 18 in the Montagne Center.

## ► Menu

### SENIOR CITIZENS CENTER

**MONDAY**-Pork chops, sweet potatoes, green beans, salad, milk, rolls, fruit.

**TUESDAY**-Catfish, French fries, beans, salad, milk, cornbread, pudding.

**WEDNESDAY**-Meatloaf, mixed vegetables, broccoli & cheese, milk, rolls, pie.

**THURSDAY**-Stew, salad, cornbread, milk, cake.

**FRIDAY**-CLOSED FOR NEW YEARS HOLIDAY

## ► Births

**P**ahton Isiah Dominguez, a boy, was born Dec. 19, 2004, at 11:51 a.m. weighing 7 pounds, 11 ounces and was 21 inches long. His parents are Jesse and Jodie Dominguez of Colorado City. His grandparents are Don and Virgil Duran and Jesse and Angie Dominguez. He was welcomed home by big brothers Jadrian, Bryson and Xavier Dominguez.

**B**rianna Nevaeh Gonzales, a girl, was born Dec. 19, 2004, at 5:56 p.m. weighing 6 pounds, 9 ounces and was 20 inches long. Her parents are Caroline Gonzales and Joe Benitez. Her grandparents are Patricia and Tom Gutierrez of Big Spring, Sammy Gonzales of Lamesa and Dominga and Bertin Benitez of Midland.

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J'Renee's Photography  
700 Runnels 264-6723

## Sappy v An c

By DENISE (KRT)

PHILADE Bing Crosby player, dre white Chr Steve Maur into the hol his South townhouse in a family putting up tree — a flame-retard plastic Chr

Decorating It takes abo from strin lights that c sticking the top. "It take take the tr closet and g box," Maur

He's been tree aficiono he bought years ago fr promptly fe it. Maurer l in teasing, all, he is th tions man P e n n s Horticultur

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Maurer unique in f Americans more faux h holidays th

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## Sappy vs. Snappy An ode to the Christmas tree

By DENISE COWIE

(KRT)  
PHILADELPHIA — Bing Crosby is on the CD player, dreaming of a white Christmas, and Steve Maurer is getting into the holiday spirit in his South Philadelphia townhouse by indulging in a family tradition — putting up the Christmas tree — a fade-resistant, flame-retardant, lop-sided plastic Christmas tree.

Decorating is a breeze. It takes about 15 minutes, from stringing on the lights that came with it to sticking the wire star on top. "It takes me longer to take the tree out of the closet and get it out of the box," Maurer says.

He's been an artificial-tree aficionado ever since he bought one as a joke years ago for \$5 and then promptly fell in love with it. Maurer has paid for it in teasing, though. After all, he is the public-relations manager for the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society.

"I'm part of an organization that is committed to planting and maintaining trees," he says, defending himself. "Cutting one down and bringing it inside feels sacrilegious."

"That's his way of saying he's cheap," says his wife, Roxanne Christensen.

Maurer is hardly unique in fancying fake. Americans are displaying more faux firs during the holidays than ever.

The National Christmas Tree Association reported an uptick in sales of real trees last year, to 23.4 million, after three years of steep declines, and it's projecting another increase this season.

But fake-tree sales are soaring. Last year, sales jumped nearly 30 percent over 2002, according to the association's tally, to 9.6 million — and that doesn't count the millions of artificials bought in previous years that will be dragged out of attics.

"What we're seeing is that more and more people are putting up multiple Christmas trees in their homes.

Often that will include live and artificial trees," says Lowe's spokeswoman Jennifer Smith.

Tree farmers are fighting back.

In September, Oregon growers unveiled "the first designer Christmas tree" during New York's Fashion Week, a Noble fir hand-picked for its beauty, fragrance and color.

How perfect is it?



KRT Photo/Sarah Grover

Kenny Kehr, who grows Christmas trees in Chalfont, Penn., points out that a real tree provides oxygen and habitat as it grows and isn't made from oil.

Grower Joseph Sharp says somebody walked up to one at a trade show, felt its branches, and said, "That's the most beautiful artificial tree I've ever seen."

The Christmas tree trade group also is boosting live trees through a cross-promotion with "The Polar Express" and a contest offering college scholarships (see [www.realchristmastrees.org](http://www.realchristmastrees.org)).

You can chalk up some of the faux trees' popularity to the introduction of Christmas-in-a-box, or what's officially known as the prelit hinged tree.

"You pop it out of the box; the limbs drop down, and it's ready, so to speak," says Michael Petrie, a vice president at J. Franklin Styer Nurseries in Delaware County, Pa., which sells both real trees and fakes.

The biggest faux tree in his store is a 14-footer that comes in four sections, all prelit.

Some artificial trees look remarkably lifelike — unlike the blue, pink and platinum-colored numbers that started showing up in hipster home furnishings stores a couple of years back and are really big now, riding the retro wave.

They flaunt their phoni-ness, harkening back to the aluminum trees that lit up the '50s and '60s, and got a boost this fall with "Season's Gleanings: The Art of the Aluminum Christmas Tree" by John Shimon and Julie Lindemann (Melcher Media, \$16.95), a photographic celebration of metallic memories.

"When we first started accumulating the (vintage) trees, they were very passe. That was in the early '90s, and they were \$1, \$5," says Lindemann, who, along with Shimon, lives in Manitowoc, Wis., where aluminum trees were born in the 1950s as an

offshoot of the cookware industry.

Lindemann and Shimon acquired enough for an art installation, which spawned the book. Vintage aluminum trees are hot these days, but Lindemann and Shimon's foil forest isn't for sale. "We've actually received nasty e-mails saying, 'Oh, you're just going to cash in on them,'" says Lindemann. "But we love our trees. We remember where we got them all."

Amid the fakery, let's not forget fiber-optic trees, whose pulsing lights bring back that disco feeling, or trees with their own remotes so that, without getting off the couch, you can change the color of your lights, or make them twinkle at different speeds. (Try that on Uncle Albert after his third eggnog.)

"Yes, more consumers are buying artificial trees," admits Bucks County, Pa., tree farmer Kenny Kehr, who probably knows as much about the Christmas tree business as anyone around.

For 25 years, he's sold real trees all over the East Coast for Kirk Co., one of the biggest tree producers in North America.

On the side, he runs a small choose-and-cut farm near Doylestown, Pa.

Kehr shoots down the old argument that artificial trees are kinder to the environment because they're not tossed out each year. "They are manufactured from oil," he says.

Tree-farm trees, on the other hand, provide erosion control because they are usually planted on marginal farmland, and they help clean the air. An acre of growing trees gives off enough oxygen to meet the needs of 18 people.

"And while it's growing, it provides (habitat) for the birds and wildlife," Kehr says.



Herald photo/Marsha Sturdivant

Teresa Thomas, Howard County treasurer, and Hollis McCright, Howard County librarian, present a \$500 check to Capt. Russ Keeney of the Salvation Army. The funds were raised by the Howard County employees and will benefit the Christmas efforts of the Corps.

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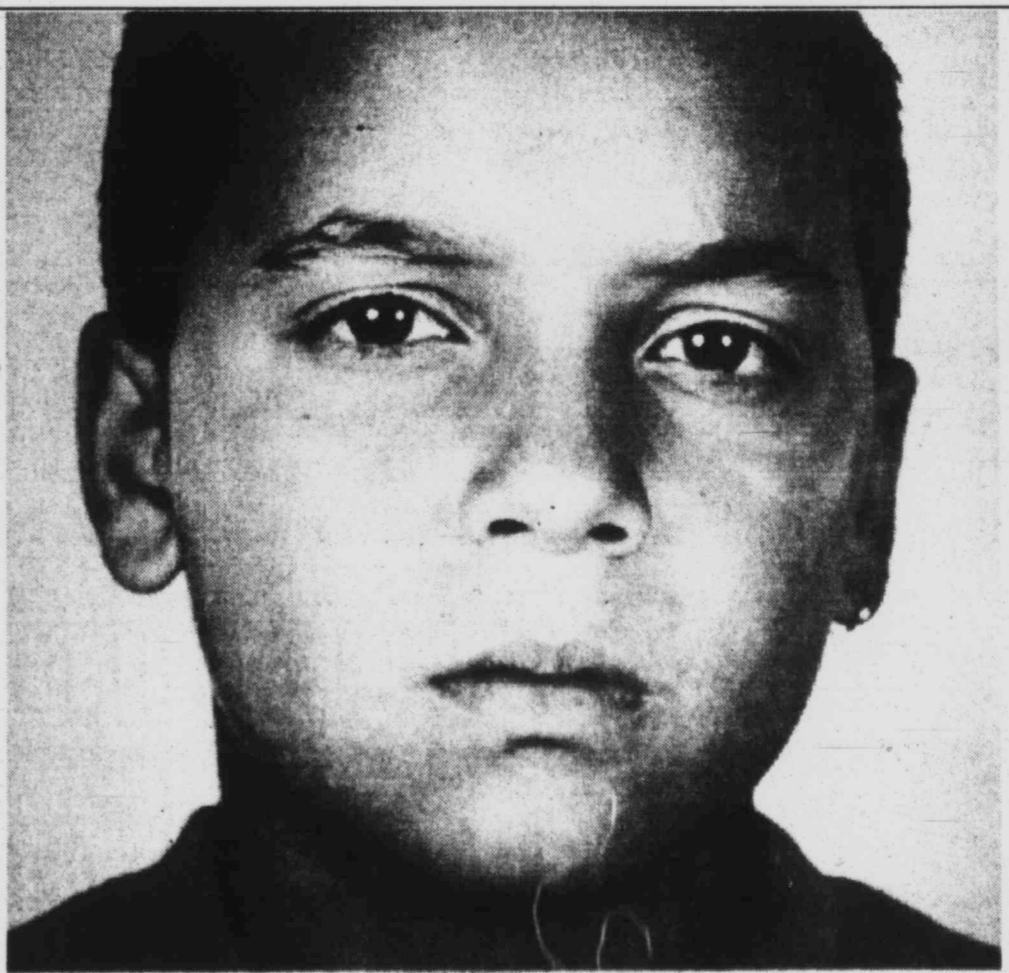


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## Daughter helps give mother the perfect holiday gift

By DAVID CASSTEVENS

(KRT)

FOREST HILL — The jingle of bells startled her.

When he walked through the front door, she turned toward the sound of the voice that called her name.

"I'm looking for Joyce Lynn!"

"I'm Joyce," the blind woman answered.

Joyce Lynn Ray had no idea who her daughter had invited into their home on a recent Monday night until the unannounced visitor bounded across the small living room and greeted her with a hug.

Her hand touched his pillow-padded belly.

She lay her cheek against what felt like a full, silky beard.

Was it really him? The woman knew for certain the moment she heard his hearty laugh, and he said to her, "I've been waiting to speak to you all these years."

"Santa!" she exclaimed.

Shirian Rutherford had given the perfect gift.

She shared her mother's joy, her eyes bright with tears.

"Have you been good?" Santa asked Ray.

Now in her late 60s, this woman who cooks and cleans, who collects dolls and grows flowers, and who writes short stories and makes quilts as gifts for family members, rested her head on his shoulder, as blissful as a cherished child.

"Santa," she said, "you know I have."

For as long as her daughter can remember,

Ray has loved the holidays. She often talks about her memories of Christmas when she was growing up on a small farm near Anderson with her parents and 10 brothers and sisters.

She remembers writing her letter addressed to the North Pole.

As a girl, she never talked to Santa in person, but every Christmas morning, she found a doll that she had told him she wanted, or a toy, and a shoebox filled with apples and oranges and ribbon candy.

"We didn't have much," Ray recalled.

Yet she never felt poor or deprived.

Her years of seeing Christmas ended during her 20s, after a hereditary condition left her sightless. But her love for the wonder of the holiday season, and for life, endured.

"I didn't let blindness conquer me," she said. "I'm not a person to just sit down."

Shirian Rutherford wanted to do something special for her mother.

Last December, she visited two area shopping malls that hired Santa's helpers and asked if one of the Santas would spend a few minutes visiting with her mother.

She even offered to pay for Santa's time.

Sorry, she was told. Kids only.

One day this month, Rutherford was looking through the "Fort Worth Star-Telegram" when she spotted a two-line classified ad. It read: "REAL SANTA. On-Call. \$20" and listed a local telephone

number. She called and explained her request.

Al Ziegelbauer's ad was a bit overstated. He isn't the real Santa Claus — unless Santa is a 75-year-old retired Air Force master sergeant and cancer survivor who lives with his wife in Bedford.

He placed the ad partly because he has lots of free time and owns a full Santa costume he bought, used, three years ago at a garage sale.

He is also a caring person. He delivers meals twice a week for the Meals onWheels program in Haltom City.

Sure, he told Rutherford. I'll come.

It was 60 miles round trip, but he would be there.

With bells on. Santa knew all about the childhood of the woman he surprised.

"Remember when I used to leave you oranges and apples?" he asked Ray.

He told her that Whitey, her childhood pet hen, was with him at the North Pole.

By this time, Ray knew that her daughter was in cahoots with Santa — how else would he know so much about her life, so long ago? — but to her, his visit to their home seemed magical. At one point, the excitement took her breath away.

"You OK, Mama?" her daughter asked.

Ray nodded and asked for a glass of water.

Before he left, Santa handed her several packages, gifts from her daughter.

As the two sat on the

couch, Ray began unwrapping a rectangular box lying across her lap.

"Know what it is?" Santa asked.

Ray felt with her right hand.

She touched — what was it? — frilly material, a tiny dress.

In darkness, her hand moved along the garment and lightly touched a small face.

A doll's face. The porcelain face of an angel.

Oh Santa, she said. "It's so beautiful."



KRT Photo/M.L. Gray  
Al Ziegelbauer, 75, left, of Bedford gives a hug to Joyce Lynn Ray at her home in Forest Hill Monday, Dec. 13. Ray, who has been blind for 40 years, never talked to Santa before.

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## Useful tips on keeping warm during cold weather

By MATT CROSS

Special to the Herald

When winter temperatures drop significantly below normal, staying warm and safe can become a challenge, especially for seniors. There are several factors that can put the seniors at risk during winter storms and lengthy freezing periods such as unexpected power or heating system failure.

Exposure to cold temperatures, whether indoors or outdoors, can cause serious or life-threatening health problems. Seniors are particularly at risk, but anyone can be affected. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Comfort Keepers have provided these tips for seniors to remain safe during the cold weather

season.

- Be cautious with space heaters — do not place a space heater within 3 feet of anything that may catch on fire, such as drapes, furniture or bedding and never cover your space heater. In addition to being a fire hazard, space heaters may also increase the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

- Consistently check the temperature — Older adults often make less body heat because of slower metabolism and less physical activity. When over 65 years of age, it is important to check home temperatures often especially during severely cold weather.

- Eat nutritiously — Eating well-balanced meals will help seniors stay warmer. Do not drink alcoholic or caffeinated

beverages — they cause body temperatures to drop more rapidly (regardless of age).

- Dress appropriately — Be sure the outer layer of clothing is tightly woven, preferably wind resistant, to reduce body-heat loss caused by wind. Using wool, silk or polypropylene as the inner layers of clothing will hold more body heat than cotton.

- Keep a water supply — Have an extra supply of water stored in clean containers or purchase bottled water (five gallons per person) in case your water pipes freeze and rupture.

By preparing a senior's home for the winter months and taking the necessary safety precautions, we can reduce the risk of weather-related health problems.

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- Isaiah 9:6

Wishing you and your family the gifts of peace, faith and enlightenment throughout this holy season.

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Home Hospice of Big Spring recently donated a total of \$5,000 to several area charitable agencies. Above, Director Debra Read, right, presents a \$1,000 check to Sherry Hodnett, left, and Nancy Jones of the local Retired Senior Volunteer Program. At left, Read presents a check to Salvation Army Capt. Russ Keeney. Other checks were presented to the Colorado City Kiwanians, Snyder Meals on Wheels and the Lamesa Meals on Wheels.

HERALD photos/Steve Reagan

## New Year's resolutions

TWC offers six steps for a successful job search

AUSTIN — The resolution — it's a New Year's tradition.

The New Year provides a fresh slate wiped clean of last year's procrastinating and filled with promise and hope of losing weight, paying off debt or spending more quality time with family.

One popular New Year's resolution — finding a new job — might be easier in 2005. Texas hit an all-time record high of the number of people employed (nearly 10.4 million), according to the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), with the unemployment rate down from 6.6 percent in November 2003 to 5.7 percent in November 2004.

"Finding the right job to match experience and interests requires the right tools," said Diane Rath, chair and commissioner representing the public for TWC. "We are committed to offering Texans a wide range of career-development tools, including WorkInTexas.com, training programs and career guidance."

To help job seekers fulfill their New Year's resolutions, TWC has developed six "HIRE ME" steps toward a successful job hunt.

**H:** Assemble a professional HISTORY. The first step of a new job search begins with taking the time to examine past work experience, achievements and education.

Conduct a professional history "audit" to aid in the development of an updated résumé or portfolio. The audit will help job seekers determine what they are qualified to do, serving as a reminder of what skills and successes to highlight, and expectations to set with the potential employer. Job seekers should also

take inventory of their relationships, as friends and colleagues may be able to share leads regarding potential employment opportunities.

**I:** Be "INTERVIEW-READY." Before beginning the actual job search, job seekers should get organized. Develop a filing system for extra copies of résumés and relevant work samples, or to keep track of job postings or announcements. Also, now is the time to get in touch with mentors, past employers and other contacts

to update them about the pending job search. Double check their contact information and ask their permission for listing them as an appropriate reference.

**R:** REGISTER on WorkInTexas.com, a no-cost, online employment resource for employers and job seekers that boasts more than 340,000 available positions statewide. Using an online job resource will provide quick access to thousands of job postings and offer job seekers the ability to focus their search on positions that match their qualifications. Keep contact information updated on the site, and take advantage of online tools available to enhance the job search, such as salary data, training and educational resources.

**E:** Contact the EMPLOYER. With job opportunities identified and résumé in shape, it is time to contact potential employers. Follow the employers' specific instructions regarding the application process — some request a cover letter and copy of a résumé and others may require an application form.

See TWC, Page 7C

**"Finding the right job to match experience and interests requires the right tools."**

—Diane Rath,  
Texas Workforce Commission

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## Top pecan entries headed to state show

ABILENE — The annual West Texas Regional Pecan Show reflected the pecan crop in the western half of Texas, said John Begnaud, Texas Cooperative Extension agent for horticulture in Tom Green County and a show coordinator.

"The quality was good with kernel color being a little darker than normal," Begnaud said. "That's probably due to the abundant moisture and prolonged periods of cloudy weather we've had this season."

"Consumers typically equate a light golden color with quality and a dark color with rancidity," he said. "With fresh, high quality pecans that's generally not the case. With pecans in abundance this year, I wouldn't let the darker

kernels keep me from enjoying one of the finest treats West Texas has to offer this holiday season."

The show — sponsored by Texas Cooperative Extension — had 225 entries from 15 counties. The competition is divided into "commercial," "classic," and "native" categories.

Grand champion commercial pecan honors went to a Wichita entry grown by Zane Eoff of Glasscock County. The pecans yielded 62.8 percent edible kernel. Reserve champion honors went to an Oconee entry

grown by J.R. Black Jr. of Taylor County.

Grand champion classic pecan title was a Barton pecan entry grown by Sun Valley Farms of Pecos County. The entry yielded 58.9 percent edible kernel. Reserve Champion Classic honors went to a Nacona variety entry grown by Leroy and Sally Olsak of Schleicher County.

The grand champion native pecans were exhibited by the Doyle Pecan Farm of Menard County. The nuts yielded 51.2 percent edible kernel. The reserve champion native was grown by Jan Pendergrass of Martin County.

"These shows are a reliable tool for demonstrating which varieties

See PECANS, Page 7C



TOMMY YEATER

## Topless Mini raises roof on fun driving

By MATT NAUMAN

Knight Ridder Newspapers

Are there better cars than the 2005 Mini Cooper convertible? Faster ones? More practical vehicles?

Sure on all three counts, but only a certified curmudgeon would resist the notion that this is, perhaps, the most fun car available right now.

No car prompts more smiles, elicits more questions, gets more appreciative nods.

And women, in particular, seem to love the notion of this affordable, enjoyable product. Pricing starts around \$21,000. The one we drove had a window sticker of just under \$25,000.

But let's put it in reverse before we drop the top.

Mini is a legendary British brand that was little seen in this country because its cars were — ta da! — just so darn small. Ownership of the name shifted to Germany's BMW a few years back, and, in March



The 2005 Mini Cooper convertible.

2002, an all-new Mini Cooper went on sale in America.

It kept the friendly shape of the classic, but added contemporary (and upscale) features. It was bigger, too, at nearly two feet longer than the original Mini. Still, at 142.8 inches long, it was a foot shorter than a Mazda Miata, and certainly

deserved its Mini moniker.

Both owners and critics loved it. Sales in 2002 (24,590) exceeded projections. Sales in 2003 (36,010) were up 46 percent. It was picked by 50 auto writers, including me, as North American Car of the Year at the 2003 Detroit auto show.

Available in two flavors — as

a base Cooper with a 115-horsepower 1.6-liter four-cylinder and as a Cooper S with a 163-horsepower version of that engine — the Mini was cool and hot.

But, and it's almost inevitable, what's cool becomes a bit dated, and what's hot becomes a bit lukewarm. Mini sales through October are flat compared with the first 10 months of last year. Owners still love their Minis, but the buzz has quieted a bit.

Which means it's a time for a new model.

The 2005 Mini Cooper and Cooper S convertibles went on sale in September.

And while math isn't my strong point, they expand the formula that says Mini equals Fun into something like Mini — top equals Fun.

I just spent a week in an '05 Cooper convertible painted hot orange (more like smoked salmon to my eye). It reminded me just how much I like this car.

The design, especially the interior with its use of bold colors, large gauges and techie toggle switches, is inviting. The car has four seats, but is really designed for two people. And although it's quite small and I'm quite large, I fit quite easily into its bigger-than-you'd-think cabin.

The convertible top is an ingenious addition: With the push of a button, it slides back about 15 inches to create a large, sunroof-like opening. Push the button again and the car's electro-hydraulic motors fold the roof completely away behind the rear seats. No tonneau cover is needed as the front of the folded roof serves as protection.

The whole operation takes about 15 seconds, and opening the sunroof portion can be done at speeds up to 75 mph.

Carrying cargo isn't one of the Mini's strengths, although engineers have tried to make

See MINI, Page 7C





MINI

Continued from Page 6C

sure openings are wide. Trunk capacity of just 5.8 cubic feet — to make an oddball comparison, the new Mercury Montego sedan has a 21-cubic-foot trunk — shrinks to 4.2 cubic feet with the top down. Folding rear seats do increase the Mini's cargo capacity, however.

The only thing I didn't like about the convertible was that the dark blue soft top didn't really match its orange paint job. (I should note that I'm rarely consulted for fashion advice.)

The Mini's primary weakness remains the power of its base engine. The Brazilian-built 1.6-liter four-cylinder makes a measly 115 horsepower. Considering that the convertible apparatus adds about 200 pounds over the regular Cooper, that makes it even less thrilling.

Yet, the ride is so tight and the standard Getrag five-speed manual trans-

mission is so precise that you can still have fun on the road. It just takes a bit of work to coax maximum performance from the motor.

There is a Cooper S version that supercharges that engine to boost power to 168, a bithigher total for the 2005 model year. That car, which also adds sport seats and a different interior trim, is about \$3,500 more expensive than the base Cooper convertible.

Those who have desired one of the trendy-mobiles of the past half-decade or so now can choose from topless versions of them as well. The Mini Cooper convertible sells for about \$21,000. The VW New Beetle convertible is about \$22,000. And the Chrysler PT Cruiser convertible starts at \$20,000.

It now seems like eons ago when we all proclaimed the end of the convertible. Considering that bleak scenario, I definitely prefer the current situation, where choices are measured using SPM (smiles per mile).

TWC

Continued from Page 6C

Either way, the goal is to project a professional image and, ultimately, land an interview. Proofread all correspondence carefully, check for spelling errors, and make sure sentences and paragraphs are well organized. When in doubt, ask a friend or family member to look over the application materials.

M: MEET and greet. After passing the initial screening process, it is time for the next step — the interview. Be sure to know the "who, what and when" of the interview, and get directions just in case. In preparation, practice answering questions with a friend and be sure to highlight skills that meet the qualifications of the position. Have a good working knowledge of the company and the available position, and remember to feel at ease throughout the conversation. Personality and culture fit will most likely be factors in the interviewer's decision. Afterward, be sure to send each inter-

viewer a personal thank-you note.

E: Keep up the ENTHUSIASM. Once hired, the real work begins. Lay out a career path with specific goals. Ask for advice from others in the field, and develop relationships with people within the organization and community. Consider joining professional organizations, attending conferences or workshops, or taking additional courses at a local college to increase industry knowledge and skill sets.

"Finding a new job, or even enhancing a current career, doesn't have to be an up-hill battle," said Rath. "Workforce professionals are available across the state to provide personalized assistance to any Texan wanting to achieve new or loftier career goals."

The Texas Workforce Commission is a state agency dedicated to helping Texas employers, workers and communities prosper economically. For details on TWC and the services it offers in unison with its network of local workforce development boards, call (512) 463-8556 or visit [www.texasworkforce.org](http://www.texasworkforce.org).

PECANS

Continued from Page 6C

are best suited for our region of Texas," said Tnaud. "Some of my personal favorites include Pawnee, Wichita, Cheyenne, Western and the Hopi.

According to Begnaud, the West Texas region is the largest of Texas' four growing areas. The boundaries roughly run

from El Paso to Andrews down to Menard and up north to Abilene.

The winners of the West Texas regional show will be entered in the state pecan show in July 2005.

For more information contact Begnaud at (325) 659-6528.

Tommy Yeater is the Cooperative Extension agent, agriculture, for Howard County.

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Chad Wayne Brown, 3901 Ave. O, Snyder  
Maria Campos, 751 Agua Pesada, El Paso  
Wayne V. Carpenter, 3766 Patriot Drive No. 10, Abilene  
Stormi Dale Chandler, 309 N. Bryan/217 N. Bryan, Garden City  
Mart R. Clem, 10911 Wood Meadow, Dallas  
Andrea Coxe, PO Box 1042, Sterling City  
James Ditto, 501 W. 17th Street Box 11, Big Spring  
Kathi Duke, 337 Greeson Street, Sumnerville, Ga.  
Shannon Fondra, 910 N. Runnels or PO Box 715, Coahoma  
Jimmie Todd Foster, 2506 Albrook, Big Spring  
Kenneth Galindo, 6830 El Paso Drive, El Paso  
Christopher George, 215 S. Third Street Apt. 30, Laramie.  
Frank Gibbs, 1102 Highway 176, Big Spring  
Billy J. Gonzales, 1212 S. Hannah Road, Hobbs, N.M.  
Martha Graham, 2135 Mossy Creek Drive, San Antonio  
Timothy Edward Hansen, 1310 Park Avenue, Big Spring  
Jeremy Royce Harman, 6713 E. Robinson, Stanton  
Erin Jean Hernandez, 2901 Runnels, Big Spring  
John A. Hernandez, 4405 N. Garfield, Apt. 1002, Midland  
Sharon Annette James, 1311 W. Second Street, Big Spring  
Raelynn Jennings, 1904 E. 25th Street, Big Spring  
Danny Ray Johnson, 2601 N. Lynn, Lamesa  
Erica Marie Letnix Johnston, 3100 Caldera Blvd Apt. 2314, Midland  
Andres Lee Juarez, Rt. 3 Box 389, Big Spring  
Ryan Kendrick, 1425 E. Sixth, Apt. 34, Big Spring  
Amber Lynn King, 701 E. 15th Street, Big Spring  
Robert P. Landrum, 310 E. Palace Ave., Hobbs N.M.  
Jonathan Lee Lanham, 3708 28th Street, Lubbock  
Diana Marie Luna, 715 Shinnery Lane, Brownfield  
Judy Mata, 6309 E. Midway Road, Big Spring  
Vaughn Lee Medina, 4000 W. Highway 80, Big Spring  
Clara Lee Meek, 1407 Johnson, Big Spring  
Ernest Meza, 1902 N. Midland Drive, Midland  
Linda Michelle Molina, 1545 Locust, Colorado City  
Debra Montez, 103 N. 18th Street, Lamesa  
Brigido Moreno, 1330 Powell, Mesquite  
Arthur Ortega, 607 Bristlewood Cove, Cedar Park  
Dandra C. Ortega, 2300 Camp Dr. Apt. 1, Midland  
Erica Elaine Ortega, 214 Grimes, Big Spring  
Elva L. Perkins, 2414 N. Anderson Road, Big Spring  
Lori Ann Pichon, 62159 Sylve Street, Lacombe, La.  
Nina Powell, Highway 103 East, Lufkin  
Karla Quimby, 1005 W. Debeca, Hobbs, N.M.  
Robert Earl Ramsey, 2105 Scurry, Big Spring  
Salome Adolph Rios, 2511 Albrook, Big Spring  
Merlie Robles, 3702 Hamilton, Big Spring  
Evelyn Rodriguez, PO Box 2942 or 5402 Lancaster, Odessa  
Debra Ruth, 1311 Mobile Street, Big Spring  
Alexandra Silva, 2700 Ave. G, Snyder  
Allen Stanford, 774 E. 8th Street, Colorado City  
Stephanie B. Street, 2611 Ryan Pl. Dr., Fort Worth  
Tracy J. Thompson, 8406 S. Service Road, Big Spring  
Terri Lynn Ward Trevathan, 1003-2 County Road 402, Seminole  
Jacob Unger, County Road 402, Seminole  
Myron Dewayne Westmoreland, 2615 Chanute, Big Spring  
Richard Wren Jr., 3303 91st Street, Lubbock  
David Yanez, 2507 Gunter, Big Spring  
Anthony Yates, 1807 1/2 Johnson, Big Spring  
James Dean Zeigenbein, 9413 University, Odessa  
Shuang Cheng Zhang, 1201 Gregg Street, Big Spring  
County Court Decisions:  
Judgment and Sentence: Selestino Hernandez III, consumption of alcohol by a minor - thrif offense enhanced, \$311 court costs, 60 days in jail.  
Judgment and Sentence: Shane Estes, driving while license suspended, \$100 fine, \$311 court costs, 90 days in jail.  
Judgment and Sentence: Robert Ramirez Sr., theft by check - more than \$20 less than \$500, \$311 court costs, 180 days in jail.  
Judgment and Sentence: Ricky Bob Yanez, criminal mischief - more than \$50 less than \$500, \$250 fine, \$311 court costs, 180 days in jail (jail time suspended, 12 months probation).  
Judgment and Sentence: David Dean Conklin, theft by check - more than \$20 less than \$500, \$311 court costs, 90 days in jail.  
Judgment and Sentence: Allison Redding, theft by check - more than \$20 less than \$500, \$250 fine, \$311 court costs, 180 days in jail (jail time suspended, 24 months probation).  
Judgment and Sentence: Selestino Hernandez III, theft - more than \$50 less than \$500, \$311 court costs, 60 days in jail.  
Judgment and Sentence: Alice Gildner Hanke, theft by check - more than \$20 less than \$500, \$100 fine, \$311 court costs, 180 days in jail (jail time suspended, 12 months probation).  
Judgment and Sentence: Stephanie Powell, theft - more than \$500 less than \$1,500, \$311 court costs, 90 days in jail.  
Judgment and Sentence: John Paul Ramirez, assault causing bodily injury - family violence, \$1,500 fine, \$311 court costs, 180 days in jail.  
Judgment and Sentence: John Matthew Gonzales, driving while intoxicated - open container, \$750 fine, \$376 court costs, 180 days in jail (jail time suspended, 12 months probation).  
Judgment and Sentence: James Burlin Williams Jr., criminal trespass, \$250 fine, \$261 court costs, 180 days in jail (jail time suspended, 12 months probation).  
Probated Judgment: Esha Ward, criminal trespass, \$250 fine, \$261 court costs, 180 days in jail (jail time suspended, 12 months probation).  
Probated Judgment: Blake Ryan Lyle, evading arrest, \$250 fine, \$261 court costs, 180 days in jail (jail time suspended, 12 months probation).  
Judgment and Sentence: Robert Lee Aldridge Jr., burglary of a vehicle (count 1), \$311 court costs, 120 days in jail.  
Judgment and Sentence: Robert Lee Aldridge Jr., burglary of a vehicle (count 2), \$261 court costs, 120 days in jail.  
Judgment and Sentence: Robert Lee Aldridge Jr., burglary of a vehicle (count 3), \$311 court costs, 120 days in jail.  
Judgment and Sentence: Robert Lee Aldridge Jr., burglary of a vehicle (count 4), \$311 court costs, 120 days in jail.  
Judgment and Sentence: Robert Lee Aldridge Jr., burglary of a vehicle (count 5), \$311 court costs, 120 days in jail.  
Judgment and Sentence: Robert Lee Aldridge Jr., burglary of a vehicle (count 6), \$311 court costs, 120 days in jail.  
Judgment and Sentence: Robert Lee Aldridge Jr., burglary of a vehicle (count 7), \$311 court costs, 120 days in jail.  
Judgment and Sentence: Robert Lee Aldridge Jr., burglary of a vehicle (count 8), \$311 court costs, 120 days in jail.  
Judgment and Sentence: Robert Lee Aldridge Jr., burglary of a vehicle (count 9), \$311 court costs, 120 days in jail.  
Judgment and Sentence: Robert Lee Aldridge Jr., burglary of a vehicle (count 10), \$311 court costs, 120 days in jail.  
Probated Judgment: David James Renteria, driving while intoxicated - second offense open container, \$1,500 fine, \$376 court costs, 180 days in jail and 180 day license suspension (jail time suspended, 24 months probation).  
Marriage Licenses:  
Gerald Cobos, 30, and Diana Marie Renteria, 28, both of Knott.  
Emmanuel Rodriguez Ramirez, 22, and Linda Eva Rodriguez, 29, both of Big Spring.  
Leonard Guerrero, 22, and Brandi Michelle Hutchison, 20, both of Lafayette, La.  
Luis Martinez III, 29, and Stephanie Michelle Martinez, 28, both of Big Spring.  
Eric Rudolph DelBosquez, 19, and Jessica Lynn Hernandez, 24, both of Big Spring.  
Ruben Valencia Gamboa, 30, and Kendra Kay Alcantar, 25, both of Big Spring.  
Ruben Roman Gamboa, 48, and Melinda Marquez Machado, 28, both of Big Spring.  
District Court Filings:  
Lisa Cain vs. Jimmy Vaughn Cain, divorce.  
Greg Mcalister vs. Cammie Mcalister, divorce.  
Citibank South Dakota vs. Samantha F. Horton, accounts, notes and contracts.  
Francisco Bustamante and Rosa Bustamante vs. Ingrid Dianne Marquez, injury or damages with a motor vehicle.  
Warranty deeds:  
Grantor: Mark A. Thompson and Elizabeth Thompson  
Grantee: Roger K. Winters and Becky Winters  
Property: Lot 12, Block 2, College Park Estates  
Date Filed: Dec. 14, 2004  
Grantor: Robert Wegner and Sherry Wegner  
Grantee: Thomas A. Fay  
Property: Lot 1, Block 30, Monticello Addition  
Date Filed: Dec. 14, 2004  
Grantor: Victor M. Kyryliuk and Carol Kyryliuk  
Grantee: Lester Potter and Velma Potter  
Property: Lot 34, Block 5, Douglas Addition  
Date Filed: Dec. 16, 2004  
Grantor: Luis Rios  
Grantee: Howard County  
Property: The S/50 feet of Lots 9, 10 and 11, Block 4, Wright's Airport Addition  
Date Filed: Dec. 17, 2004  
Grantor: Luis Rios and Erlinda Rios  
Grantee: Howard County  
Property: The S/2 of Lot 9, Block 5, Cedar Crest Addition  
Date Filed: Dec. 17, 2004  
Grantor: Carlton House Apartments  
Grantee: Verne L. Robin Jr. and Teresa Robin  
Property: Lot 6, Block 6, Wasson Place  
Date Filed: Dec. 17, 2004  
Grantor: Rodney A. Love and Teresa G. Love  
Grantee: Janet Ryder and Elvin Ryder  
Property: A .364 acre tract out of Lot 1, Block 13, North Park Hill Addition  
Date Filed: Dec. 20, 2004  
Grantor: Mike Abusaab  
Grantee: Shane Ward  
Property: Lots 4 and 5, Block 2, McDowell Heights Addition  
Date Filed: Dec. 20, 2004  
Grantor: Bobby S. Wash  
Grantee: Robert C. Wash  
Property: Lots 8, 9, 10 and 11, Block 39 and Lots 19, 20, 21 and 22, Block 40 Forsan Townsite  
Date Filed: Dec. 20, 2004  
Warranty deeds with vendors in:  
Grantor: Dare Lee Highley Jr.  
Grantee: James Anderson  
Property: Lots 4 and 5, Block 9, Washington Place  
Date Filed: Dec. 14, 2004  
Grantor: Gary W. Stovall  
Grantee: Brad Burt and Terri Burt  
Property: Am 834 acre tract out of Section 43, Block 31, T-1-N, T&P RR Co. Survey  
Date Filed: Dec. 16, 2004  
Grantor: Curtis Ben Bowlin and Max Ann Bowlin  
Grantee: Wesley Thixton and Betty Thixton, John Paul Nichols and Kristen Dawn Nichols  
Property: Lot 15, Block 5, Murr Heights Addition  
Date Filed: Dec. 20, 2004  
Grantor: Lois N. Chocknowsky  
Grantee: Ray Carreon and Juana Carreon  
Property: Lot 1, Block 3, Hall Addition  
Date Filed: Dec. 20, 2004  
Grantor: Billy G. Barber and Bennie Jean Barber  
Grantee: Ermelia Romo  
Property: Lots 5 and 6, Block 1, Sunset Place Annex  
Date Filed: Dec. 20, 2004

Three Cheers  
FOR A New Year

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We wish you all a very happy and healthy New Year and look forward to serving you again in 2005.

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  - 1999 Mazda Miata MX-5 Convertible - Stk# D71A, 4-Cyl., 1.8 Liter, 5-Spd. Manual, Tilt/Cruise, AM/FM Stereo, CD, Alloy Wheels. Was \$11,025. **NOW \$8,995**
  - 2004 Chevrolet Impala Sedan - Stk# D174, Power Windows and Locks, Tilt/Cruise, CD, Power Seat. Was \$14,995. **NOW \$11,995**
  - 2004 Chevrolet Classic - Stk# D145, D223, D224, Automatic, Tilt/Cruise, Power Windows, Locks and Mirrors. **3 To Choose From!** Was \$14,995. **NOW \$11,995**
  - 2001 Chevrolet Monte Carlo SS Coupe - Stk# D212, V6 3.8L, CD, Premium Sound, OnStar, Traction Control, Power Seat, Rear Spoiler, Alloy Wheels. Was \$13,995. **NOW \$11,995**
  - 2002 Chrysler PT Cruiser - Stk# D144B, Automatic, Tilt/Cruise, Power Windows, Locks and Alloy Wheels. Was \$13,995. **NOW \$12,995**
  - 2003 Pontiac Grand Am - Stk# D163, GT, 4 door, Ram Air, White, Sunroof, Loaded, One Owner, 12,000 Miles! Was \$15,995. **NOW \$13,995**
  - 2004 Dodge Intrepid SE Sedan 4D - Stk# D114, V6 2.7 Liter, Auto., FWD, A/C, Power Equipped, Tilt/Cruise, CD, Alloy Wheels. Was \$16,925. **NOW \$14,495**
  - 1993 Cadillac Allante - Stk# D122, Red, Black Convertible Top, Only 45,000 One Owner Miles. Was \$18,995. **NOW \$14,995**
  - 2002 Chevrolet Monte Carlo SS Coupe - Stk# D212, V6 3.8 Liter, Auto., CD, Leather, Power Seat, Sliding Sunroof, Alloy Wheels. Was \$18,995. **NOW \$14,995**
  - 2003 Cadillac CTS Sedan 4D - Stk# D198A V6, Auto., Power Windows/Lock, CD, OnStar, Leather, Power Seats. Was \$30,900. **NOW \$25,995**
  - 2004 Cadillac DeVille Sedan 4D - Stk# D222, Brown, Automatic, FWD, Bose Premium Sound, OnStar, Leather, Dual Power Seats, Tilt/Cruise, AM/FM Stereo, Dual Power Seats. Was \$35,995. **NOW \$28,995**
- ★ SPORT UTILITY ★**
  - 2001 Chevrolet Blazer LT - Stk# D148, Red, OnStar, 45,000 Miles. Was \$13,995. **NOW \$11,495**
  - 2001 Dodge Durango - Stk# D183, V8, 4.7 Liter, Tilt/Cruise, AM/FM Stereo, Cassette, Towing Pkg., Alloy Wheels, 3rd Seat, Rear Air. Was \$16,995. **NOW \$13,995**
  - 2003 Dodge Durango - Stk# D113, V8, 4.7 Liter, Auto., 2WD, Power Steering/Windows/Door Locks, Tilt/Cruise, Alloy Wheels. Was \$21,000. **NOW \$16,495**
  - 2000 Chevrolet Tahoe - Stk# D225, Beige/Tan, V8, Automatic, CD, OnStar, Third Seat, Running Boards, Towing Pkg. Was \$22,495. **NOW \$18,995**
  - 2004 Chevrolet Trail Blazer - Stk# D230, 6-Cyl., 4.8 Liter, 2WD, LS, A/C, Tilt/Cruise, AM/FM Stereo, CD, Alloy Wheels. Was \$22,995. **NOW \$18,995**
  - 2003 Ford Expedition - Stk# D132, V8, 4.6 Liter, CD, Power Seat, Third Seat, Towing Pkg., Alloy Wheels. Was \$25,995. **NOW \$22,995**
  - 2002 Chevrolet Suburban LT - Stk# D187, V8, 5.3L, Loaded, Tilt/Cruise, AM/FM Stereo, CD, Towing Pkg., Alloy Wheels. Was \$25,495. **NOW \$23,495**
- ★ SPORT UTILITY ★**
  - 2003 GMC Yukon - Stk# D233, V8 5.3L Bi-Fuel, CD, Leather, Power Seat, Third Seat, Privacy Glass, Running Boards, Towing Pkg. Was \$29,495. **NOW \$28,495**
  - 2004 Nissan Pathfinder Armada SE SUV 4D - Stk# D197A, V8, 5.6 Liter, Auto., 2WD A/C, Rear Air, Tilt/Cruise, AM/FM Stereo, CD, Dual Front Air Bags, Alloy Wheels. Was \$31,995. **NOW \$28,995**
- ★ PICKUPS ★**
  - 2001 Chevrolet S10 Ext. Cab - Stk# D209, 4 Cyl., 5 speed, Third Door, Tilt/Cruise, CD, Dual Front Air Bags, Alloy Wheels. Was \$10,995. **NOW \$8,995**
  - 2001 Nissan Frontier Supercharged Crew Cab - Stk# D216A, V6, 3.3L Supercharged, Auto., 2WD, A/C, Power Steering, Windows/Locks, Tilt/Cruise, Bed Liner. Was \$16,995. **NOW \$13,995**
  - 2002 Chevrolet Silverado 1500 LS - Stk# D142, V8, 2.3 Liter, Automatic, Power Equipped, CD, Dual Power Seats, Towing Pkg. Was \$18,585. **NOW \$15,495**
  - 2004 Chevrolet Silverado - Stk# D205, V6 4.3L, 6R Miles, Automatic, Tilt/Cruise, CD, Running Boards, Hard Tonneau Cover, Bed Liner, Alloy Wheels. Was \$17,995. **NOW \$15,995**
  - 2001 Chevrolet Silverado 2500 HD Ext. Cab - Stk# D140, V8, 8.1 Liter, Power Windows/Locks, Tilt/Cruise, CD, Roof Rack. Was \$20,995. **NOW \$16,995**
  - 2002 Chevrolet Avalanche - Stk# D192, V8 5.3L 4WD, 271 Off-Road Pkg., Leather, Rear Air, Power Equipped, CD, Premium Sound, Towing Pkg. Was \$19,995. **NOW \$17,995**
  - 2000 GMC Sierra 1500 Ext. Cab - Stk# D205, V8 5.3 Liter, 4 WD, Fourth Door, 271 Off Road Pkg., Leather, Power Windows, CD, Towing Pkg., Oversize Off-Rd. Tires. Was \$20,770. **SOLD**
  - 2004 Chevrolet 1500 Ext. Cab LS - Stk# D162, 5.3 V8 Auto, Beautiful Black!! Was \$21,995. **NOW \$18,995**
  - 2001 Chevrolet Silverado 1500 Ext. Cab - Stk# D207, V8, 6.0 Liter, Power Equipped, CD, Dual Power Seats. Was \$20,995. **SOLD**
  - 2000 Dodge 3500 Pickup - Stk# D196, 6-Cyl., Turbo Diesel, Tilt/Cruise, AM/FM Stereo, Cassette, Sliding Rear Windows. Was \$21,995. **NOW \$19,995**
  - 2003 Chevrolet Silverado 1500 Ext. Cab - Stk# D94, V8, 5.3 Liter, Auto., 4WD, 271 Suspension, LS, A/C, Alloy Wheels. Was \$24,710. **NOW \$21,995**
  - 2003 GMC Sierra 1500 Ext. Cab - Stk# D168, V8, 5.3 Liter, Automatic, 4WD, 271 Off-Road Pkg., CD, Premium Sound, OnStar, Leather, Stepside Bed, Towing Pkg. Was \$27,995. **NOW \$23,995**
  - 2002 Chevrolet Silverado 1500 HD Crew Cab - Stk# D218, Red, V8, 6.0 Liter 4 WD, CD, Dual Power Seats, Running Boards, Bed Liner, Grille Guard, Towing Pkg. Was \$26,010. **NOW \$23,995**
  - 2004 Chevrolet Silverado 2500 HD Ext. Cab - Stk# D236, White, V8 6.6L Turbo Diesel, Automatic, 2WD, Work Truck, Tilt/Cruise, CD, Towing Pkg., Alloy Wheels. Was \$32,995. **NOW \$28,995**
  - 2001 Chevrolet Silverado 2500 HD Crew Cab - Stk# D203, V8 6.6L Turbo Diesel 4WD, Power Windows, Doors, Tilt/Cruise, Running Boards, OnStar, Leather, Bed Liner. Was \$32,995. **SOLD**
  - 2004 Chevrolet Silverado 2500 HD Ext. Cab - Stk# D236, V8 6.6L Turbo Diesel, Automatic, 2WD, Work Truck, Tilt/Cruise, CD, Towing Pkg., Alloy Wheels. Was \$32,995. **NOW \$28,995**
  - 2003 Chevrolet Silverado 3500 Crew Cab - Stk# D211A, White, V8 6.6L Turbo Diesel, 4WD, LS, CD, Running Boards, Bed Liner, Grille Guard, Towing Pkg. Was \$36,775. **NOW \$31,995**

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**ASSISTANT MANAGER** needed at local Retail Company. Salary, health insurance and 401k. Average 48 hrs. weekly including nights until 7:00 pm. with alternating weekends. Please send Resume and References to: P.O. Box 462, Big Spring, Tx. 79721.

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**MITCHELL COUNTY** Hospital District is taking applications for:

LVN - 7AM to 7PM at Mitchell County Hospital  
RN - Weekend Coverage at ER at Mitchell County Hospital  
RN - 7PM to 7AM at Mitchell County Hospital  
LVN - 3 PM to 11PM - Wallace Medical Prison Unit

These are full-time positions with benefits. Pick up an application at Mitchell County Hospital at 997 West I-20. See Sandra Sullivan, Human Resources or call 325-728-3431, extension 7105.

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Excellent salary and bonus programs. All inquires strictly confidential.

### Help Wanted

**TAKING APPLICATIONS:** All Positions - Shop Tire Tech, Experienced Road Service Mechanic, Counter person. Computer & Knowledge of Tires a must. Apply in person only, Don's Tire & Truck Service, S. Service Rd. Exit 178. No phone calls.

**MANAGER** for new storage facility. Experience not required, short training period. Good wage, plus bonus based on profits. Send resume to: c/o P.O. Box 1431/113, Big Spring, TX 79721-1431.

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**SEEKING MYSTERY Shoppers** Mystery shoppers wanted in your area. Only experience needed is ability to shop FT/PT Make own hours. Valid Email required. (800)797-0395.

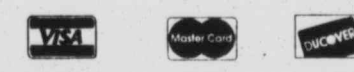
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<p><b>CARPET</b></p> <p>Bring Samples To Your Home NAME BRANDS <b>Kenny Thompson</b> 270-0548 263-4548</p>	<p><b>YOUR AD</b></p> <p><b>PUT YOUR AD HERE</b> CALL 263-7331 Herald Classifieds BIG SPRING HERALD</p>	<p><b>CONCRETE</b></p> <p>STUCCO DRIVEWAYS SIDEWALKS BLOCK FENCES <b>Chico and Sons Concrete</b> (432) 267-4044 (432) 268-6322 621 Sgt. Paredes Frank Rubio Big Spring, TX 79720</p>	<p><b>CONCRETE</b></p> <p>All Types - Driveway Patio, Sidewalk etc. Handyman work, Additions, Patio Cover, etc. <b>Call 267-7659 or 263-5272</b></p>	<p><b>FENCES</b></p> <p>CHAINLINK METAL CEDAR DOG KENNELS ORNAMENTAL IRON <b>B &amp; M Fence Co.</b> COMMERCIAL - RESIDENTIAL GET OUR PRICE &amp; COMPARE FREE ESTIMATES ROBERT MARQUEZ 263-1613 • 1-800-525-1389 1006 Lamesa Hwy. • Big Spring</p>	<p><b>FENCES</b></p> <p><b>Quality Fence Co.</b> Jimmy Marquez-Owner Finest In Fencing Wood &amp; Chainlink Free Estimates 432-267-3340</p>
<p><b>FENCES</b></p> <p><b>MARQUEZ FENCE CO.</b> All types of fences &amp; repairs. Concrete work, carports. All work guaranteed. Free Estimates Benny Marquez-Owner 267-5714</p>	<p><b>FENCE</b></p> <p><b>PREMIER FENCE</b> Sales, Service, Installation Chainlink, Wood, Vinyl, Sheet Metal, Ornamental Custom Gates, Oil Field Panels, Carports, Dog Runs. (432) 686-7505 1409 Garden City Hwy. Midland, Tx.</p>	<p><b>HOME IMPROVEMENT</b></p> <p><b>Speedy Construction</b> We Do It All! Residential &amp; Commercial Ceramic Tiles, Cabinets, Drywall, Textures, Plumbing, Electrical AC, Roofs, New Additions &amp; Lawn Service Phone: 432-263-2911 Cell: 432-816-3832 Christmas Special</p>	<p><b>HOME IMPROVEMENT</b></p> <p><b>RS HOME REPAIR</b> Custom Wood Decks, Remodel, Carpenter, Painting, Plumbing, Minor Electrical <b>FREE ESTIMATES</b> Garage door repair, Appliances installed 816-3030</p>	<p><b>HOME IMPROVEMENT</b></p> <p><b>Gibbs Remodeling</b> New home Construction • Room Additions Carports • Dry Wall Hanging &amp; Finishing &amp; Exterior Wallpaper Hanging • Ceramic Tile Installation &amp; Repair All Remodel Needs Of Any Room In Your Home. <b>Call 263-8285</b></p>	
<p><b>HOME IMPROVEMENT</b></p> <p><b>AFFORDABLE HOME MAINTENANCE</b> •Renovation •Repairs •Maintenance Quality Work You Can Trust Satisfaction Guaranteed NO JOB IS TOO SMALL! Russ Crain (owner) 432-270-2585</p>	<p><b>HOME IMPROVEMENT</b></p> <p><b>DOORS/GARAGE DOORS/OPENERS</b> Home Repair • Carpentry Sheet Work Repaired/Replaced Kitchen &amp; Bath <b>BOB'S CUSTOM WOODWORK</b> 409 E. 3RD 267-5811</p>	<p><b>HOME WORKS</b></p> <p><b>Home Works</b> Full Service Building Contractor New • Remodel • Additions • Repair Residential • Commercial Please Call For A Free Estimate Jimmy Hopper • 432-517-0555 Affordable Quality With Attention to Detail</p>	<p><b>LAWN SERVICE</b></p> <p>FALL CLEANUP TREE TRIMMING TILLING &amp; HAULING FREE ESTIMATES CALL 432-267-5460 LEAVE MESSAGE 816-6150</p>	<p><b>RENTALS</b></p> <p><b>VENTURA COMPANY</b> 432-267-2655 Houses • Duplexes 1, 2, 3 Bedrooms For rent/sale 709 E. 12TH 802 E. 12TH 606 A State 204 11TH</p>	<p><b>YOUR AD</b></p> <p><b>PUT YOUR AD HERE</b> CALL 263-7331 Herald Classifieds BIG SPRING HERALD</p>
<p><b>ROOFING</b></p> <p><b>PALACIOS ROOFING &amp; HOME IMPROVEMENT</b> Roofs, Room Additions, Ceramic Tile, Fences, Painting Insured &amp; Bonded Home Phone# 432-263-5430 Cell# 432-213-0363</p>	<p><b>ROOFING</b></p> <p><b>JOHNNY FLORES ROOFING</b> Shingles, Hot Tar &amp; Gravel. All type of repairs! Work Guaranteed. Specializing in Hot Tar Roofs and Doctor of Repairs! Free Estimates!! Big Spring &amp; Surrounding Areas. 267-1110</p>	<p><b>GARAGE SALE</b></p> <p><b>SELL YOUR HOUSEHOLD ITEMS</b> CALL 263-7331 Herald Classifieds BIG SPRING HERALD</p>	<p><b>INTERNET ADS</b></p> <p>For Information On Internet Ads Call Retail Advertising 263-7331 BIG SPRING HERALD</p>	<p><b>PEST CONTROL</b></p> <p><b>SOUTHWESTERN A-1 PEST CONTROL</b> Since 1954 432-263-6514 2008 Birdwell Lane Max F. Moore <a href="http://www.swa1pc.com">www.swa1pc.com</a> <a href="mailto:mm@swa1pc.com">mm@swa1pc.com</a></p>	<p><b>WEB PRINTING</b></p> <p>For Information On Web Printing Call Tony Hernandez 263-7331 BIG SPRING HERALD</p>

### Help Wanted

Drivers

**GIVE YOURS MORE TIME**

J.B. Hunt Dedicated ing professional driv- ings offering BO time off and excep Average \$800 per w home up to a day & week! This dedicate also includes:

- \* Weekly pay, no waiting for b
- \* Paid vacation, p after one ye
- \* Your own ass convention.
- \* 6-state area of o
- \* Excellent benefits dental, vision, prescription discou

The holidays are yourself the gift of off! But call now; pr limited!

1-866-852-4- EOE. Subj to Class A & 6 mos.

### WAITRESSES N

Split Shift Must be 1: Monday-Satu Apply in pers Red Mesa C 2401 Greg

### NURSING

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- Relief p crew

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**Help Wanted**  
Drivers  
**GIVE YOURSELF MORE TIME OFF!**

J.B. Hunt Dedicated is now hiring professional drivers for positions offering BOTH weekly time off and exceptional pay! Average \$800 per week and be home up to a day & a half each week! This dedicated package also includes:

- \* Weekly pay, no delays waiting for bills
- \* Paid vacation, pay raise after one year
- \* Your own assigned conventional
- \* 6-state area of operation
- \* Excellent benefits: medical, dental, vision, 401k, prescription discount, etc....

The holidays are here-give yourself the gift of more time off! But call now; positions are limited!

1-866-852-4327  
EOE. Subj to d/s.  
Class A & 6 mos. exp. req.

**WAITRESSES NEEDED**  
Split Shift  
Must be 18  
Monday-Saturday  
Apply in person,  
Red Mesa Grill  
2401 Gregg

**Help Wanted**  
**NEED EXPERIENCED** Lube Tech/Porter. Apply in person only at Service Department Pollard Chevrolet, Buick & Cadillac, 1501 East 4th.  
**NEED EXPERIENCE** drillers & roughnecks for Big Spring oil company. Must be able to pass drug test. Call (432)238-3832.

**Lost and Found**  
**FOUND WASSON** Road area. (1) female Dachshund brown, w/black. (1) male Pekingese, black w/brown. Call (432)263-5928.

**LOST DACHSHUND**, 1 yr old wearing red collar with rhine stones. Last seen at College Park Shopping Center. Call (432)267-2957.

**National Ads**  
**FREE MONEY** for 2005! Private-Government Grants for Personal bills, School, Business, etc. Never Repay. Live Operators. Approx. \$49 billion dollars unclaimed 2004. 1-800-410-2613 ext. 31.

**GOVERNMENT JOBS!** WILD-LIFE / POSTAL \$16.51 to \$58.00 per hour. Full Benefits. Paid Training. Call for Application and Exam Information. No Experience Necessary. Toll Free 1-888-269-6090 ext. 100.

**Real Estate for Rent**  
**Heights Apartments**  
\$99<sup>00</sup> Move In Special  
ALL BILLS PAID  
Renovated 1 bedrooms  
**267-2771**

**LOVELY NEIGHBORHOOD COMPLEX**  
Swimming Pool  
Carports,  
Most Utilities Paid,  
Senior Citizen Discounts,  
1 & 2 Bedrooms & 1 or 2 Baths  
Unfurnished  
**KENTWOOD APARTMENTS**  
1904 East 25th Street  
267-5444  
263-5000

**BEAUTIFUL GARDEN COURTYARD**  
•Swimming Pool  
•Private Patios  
•Carports  
•Appliances  
•Most Utilities Paid  
•Senior Citizens Discount  
•1 & 2 Bedroom Unfurnished  
**PARKHILL TERRACE APARTMENTS**  
800 W. Marcy Drive  
263-5555 263-5000

**1, 2 & 3 Bedrooms**  
Rent Based on Income  
**NORTHCREST APARTMENTS**  
1002 North Main  
Big Spring, TX  
(432) 267-5191

1220 East 16th - 3/2 bath.  
1400 Sycamore - 3/1 bath.  
602 1/2 George - 1/1 bath.  
All have CH/A.  
Call (432)267-2296.

**1307 COLBY**, 3 Bedroom, 1 bath. Call (432)267-3841 or 517-0642.

**1501 HILLTOP** Road, back of house. One bedroom. \$250. month, \$200. deposit. Water included. Call afternoons & evenings. (432)263-6922.

**EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY**  
All real estate advertising in this newspaper is subject to the Federal Fair Housing Act of 1988 which makes it illegal to advertise "any preference limitation or discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin, or an intention to make any such preference, limitation or discrimination."  
This newspaper will not knowingly accept any advertising for real estate which is in violation of the law. Our readers are hereby informed that all dwellings advertised in this newspaper are available on an equal opportunity basis.

**Real Estate for Rent**  
**1503 SCURRY**, Large one bedroom, one bath. All bills paid. \$350. month, \$200. deposit. Call (432)264-6611.

**1505 TUSCON**, Four bedroom, two bath, CH/A. Call (432)270-3848.

**1605 KENTUCKY** Way. 3 Bedroom, 1 bath. Garage, CH/A, fenced backyard, washer & dryer connections \$430/month, \$350/deposit. Call (432)263-8005 or 816-1330.

**1606 11TH** Place. 2 Bedroom, 1 bath with big den. Good neighborhood. \$350.00 month. Call (432)263-6922, afternoons & evenings.

**1903 GREGG** St. for rent. Great office or retail space. \$375/month plus deposit. Call (432)213-2681.

**2/2/3 near Elbow School**. Country home, good water, quiet and shady, large grounds. Forsan ISD. \$650 month, \$650.00 deposit. 1 yr lease. Call (512)755-1697.

**2604 ENT**, 3 Bedroom 2 bath, New paint/ carpet. References. \$400. month, \$250. deposit. HUD accepted. Call (432)267-7449.

**Real Estate for Rent**  
**3/2 WITH** garage. Gourmet kitchen / with built-ins. Forsan ISD, 2406 Cheyenne. \$650. month, \$400. deposit. Call (432)264-9907.

**4207 PARKWAY**, 3 bedroom, 1-1/2 bath. Call (432)267-3841 or 517-0642.

**4221 HAMILTON**, 3 bedroom, 1-1/2 bath. Call (432)267-3841 or 517-0642.

**612 GREGG**, 800 square feet. Strip/Center Location. \$450.00 month plus deposit required. Call (432)267-7449.

**624 RIDGELEA**, Clean 3 bedroom, 1-1/2 bath, CH/A. Stove & refrigerator furnished. Fenced yard, garage. \$450. month, \$200. deposit. Call (432)267-1543.

**900 SCURRY**, 3/1 Apartment. CH/A, washer, dryer hookups. Appliances furnished. \$385.00 month, \$200.00 deposit. No HUD. Call (432)213-2681

**Real Estate for Rent**  
**BIG SPRING** Building for Rent. Busy Location on Gregg Street, 12,000 square feet, \$5,000.00 per month. Call (505)318-3378

**CLEANEST** 1 Bedroom in town. \$300. Month, \$150. deposit. No pets. References required. Carport. Call (432)213-2319.

**CORONADO HILLS APARTMENTS**  
(432)267-6500  
801 W. Marcy  
Big Spring, Tx 79720  
During Months of December and January.  
Move in for \$199.00 or \$299.00.

**COUNTRY HOME**, 511 Centerpoint Rd. 3/2, C/H/A, 1 acre lot. \$550.00 month \$300 deposit. Lease and references. Call 432-267-2015 or 432-816-6595

**BARCELONA APARTMENTS**  
Choose Your Own Monthly Rent Options  
Such As **ALL BILLS PAID**  
\$299 MOVE IN SPECIAL + APPLICATION & SECURITY DEP.  
538 Westover **OPEN SATURDAY** 263-1252

**FOR SALE**  
**No Down Payment**  
OWNER FINANCING  
**Bad Credit O.K.**  
2-3-4-5 & 6 Bedroom Brick Homes  
**Call Beverly 263-3461**

**Ponderosa Apartments**  
A Nice Place For Nice People  
• All Utilities Paid  
• One Bedroom - 820 sq. ft.  
• Two Bedroom One Bath - 1080 sq. ft.  
• Two Bedroom Two Bath - 1280 sq. ft.  
• Three Bedroom Two Bath - 1800 sq. ft.  
**1425 E. 6th • 263-6319**

**NURSING PROFESSIONALS NEEDED**  
• Registered Nurse  
• Licensed Vocational Nurses  
• Certified Medication Aides  
• Certified Nurses Aides  
We offer an excellent salary and benefits are available. If you are a person dedicated to providing quality care please send a current resume or contact:  
**Stanton Nursing and Rehabilitation, L.P.**  
1100 West Broadway, Stanton, TX. 79782  
PH: (432) 756-2841 FX: (432) 756-2190  
EOE  
For other job opportunities please visit our website at [www.daybreakventure.com](http://www.daybreakventure.com)

**CARING PEOPLE**  
Caring for People  
"Caring People - Caring for People", is exactly what we're about. We value each caregiver for the contribution they make to our success.  
We are interviewing for a few "Caring People". If you are interested in making a difference and have the following skills or qualifications, please call.  
**RN - Med/Surg FT**  
**RN - ICU FT**  
**RN - Labor & Delivery**  
**RN - Surgery FT**  
**Scrub Tech FT**  
**MT - PRN**  
SMMC offers competitive salaries and an excellent benefits package.  
**Scenic Mountain Medical Center**  
1601 W. 11th Place  
Big Spring, TX 79720  
432-268-4961 432-268-4959 fax  
[robby\\_banks@chs.net](mailto:robby_banks@chs.net)

**LEASE OPERATOR**  
Energen Resources Corporation, a subsidiary of Energen Corporation has an immediate opening for a Lease Operator at its WestBrook, Texas office. Responsibilities include:  
• Monitoring, recording, and optimizing production data  
• Operating and maintaining production equipment  
• Conducting and directing the on-lease activities of contractors  
• Assuring that all leases are operating within regulatory compliance  
• Relief pump and work periodically with company roustabout crew  
The qualified applicant will have 1 - 3 year's production experience with a broad knowledge of all types of production equipment. Computer skills and proficiency with spreadsheets a must. We offer a highly competitive salary and bonus plan with a complete benefits package.  
For immediate consideration, please forward your resume and salary history to:  
Workforce Network of Midland  
Attn: Ruth Forsdick  
3510 North "A" Street, Building A  
Midland, Texas 79705  
Email: [ruth.forsdick@twc.state.tx.us](mailto:ruth.forsdick@twc.state.tx.us)  
Telephone # (432) 685-8316  
Fax #: (432) 686-8742  
An Equal Opportunity Employer

**Newsday Crossword SATURDAY STUMPER** by Doug Peterson  
Edited by Stanley Newman  
[www.stanxwords.com](http://www.stanxwords.com)

- |                            |                      |                                       |                              |
|----------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>ACROSS</b>              | <b>DOWN</b>          |                                       |                              |
| 1 Not paying attention     | 1 Turns loose (on)   | 10 Stains                             | 33 Untouchable               |
| 10 Cut of beef             | 2 Stem               | 11 Gridiron star                      | 36 Clog clearer              |
| 15 Bombard with betas      | 3 Tom Thumb composer | 12 Exceptionally                      | 37 Check out                 |
| 16 Donne creation          | 4 Knuckle under      | 13 Dreaded figure                     | 39 Complete Schedule A       |
| 17 In the sentencing phase | 5 Printing           | 14 "Uh-uh!" in Ufa                    | 40 Place for a cast          |
| 18 Get wider               | 6 Kitchen activity   | 21 Cooper, in <i>The Fountainhead</i> | 42 Allergens for some        |
| 19 Steady                  | 7 them author        | 24 Makeup accessories                 | 43 Lipstick shade            |
| 20 Eyewash unit            | 8 Western Indian     | 25 Bears, to Brutus                   | 45 Father                    |
| 22 HMO concern             | 9 Elvis #1 tune      | 26 Basic cable staple                 | 46 USMC rank                 |
| 23 Personal pronoun        |                      | 27 Seriously affected                 | 47 To (precisely)            |
| 24 Kind of clam            |                      | 28 Menu phrase                        | 48 Uncommon, long ago        |
| 28 Nacre sources           |                      | 29 "Forget it!"                       | 50 European auto             |
| 32 Whip into shape         |                      | 30 Overthrow, perhaps                 | 51 Major ending              |
| 33 Court figures           |                      | 31 Lacking passion                    | 52 Mouthpiece                |
| 34 Scrap                   |                      |                                       | 53 Erstwhile political divs. |
| 35 Ain't corrected         |                      |                                       | 56 ___ roll                  |
| 36 White's partner         |                      |                                       |                              |
| 37 Continental cabbage     |                      |                                       |                              |
| 38 Increase fraudulently   |                      |                                       |                              |
| 39 Become subject to       |                      |                                       |                              |
| 40 Roots actress           |                      |                                       |                              |
| 41 Reel from a belt        |                      |                                       |                              |
| 43 Opposite of blue        |                      |                                       |                              |
| 44 Little yapper           |                      |                                       |                              |
| 45 Sacramento paper        |                      |                                       |                              |
| 46 Glanced                 |                      |                                       |                              |
| 49 Classroom need          |                      |                                       |                              |
| 54 Space Invaders maker    |                      |                                       |                              |

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Real Estate for Rent

FOR RENT: 800 1/2 Nolan. 1 Bedroom, 1 bath. Utilities included. \$400.00 month, \$300.00 deposit. Call (432)264-9907.

NICE CLEAN open space, large 1 room apartment. Stove and refrigerator furnished. \$250.00 month \$100.00 deposit. Call (432)263-4528, (432)296-0277 or 296-1523.

SUNSET RIDGE APTS. 2911 W. Hwy 80 Big Spring New Management Family Friendly Central A/C Cable TV Large Rooms Move In Special (432)263-2292

Real Estate for Sale

\$1,000 TOTAL Move in Cost. On 1306 Marijo. New 3 bedroom, 2 bath, 2 car garage home. Reasonably good credit required, lowered interest rates to Qualified Buyer. Call now (432)520-9848. Cameo Investments Inc.

1413 SYCAMORE, 2 Bedroom, 1 bath, CH/A. \$14,500.00. Call (325)695-6100 after 6:00 p.m.

1612 BLUEBIRD. Owner Financing. Buy for \$277.00 month or Rent \$375.00 month. Call (432)264-9907.

Answer to previous puzzle  
SHRED SLOB DALL  
HEAVE PERU EDEN  
ARNEL EVIL PLOT  
DETRAINING RENE  
NOT GENERAL  
HOLDON DES  
ODIE ICON ASIDE  
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ERNIE NEWL NLER  
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HEAT DEFROSTING  
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WREN ISLE ORATE  
SING NEER TALE

Real Estate for Sale

20 ACRES on Hwy 176. Set up for Doublewide. 45K, \$6,500.00 Down, assume \$270.00 monthly @ 7.4% for 30 years. No Credit Check. Call (817)312-6322.

C-CITY LAKE Home, 4 Bedroom, 3 bath. Deeded land on large lot; fenced, newly remodeled. Call (432)263-7373 or 263-6824 after 5:00 pm.

ELEGANT SPACE! Kentwood home, Rebecca. 2000 sq. ft. on large lot. 3/2 or 4/2. Deck, ceramic tile. New A/C. Ample storage. \$86,000. Viewing appointments: (432)267-2462.

FOR SALE By Owner: Owner Financing Provided. Low down payment, will work with income tax refund, low monthly. 2 Bedroom, 1 1/2 bath. Fenced yard, 1505 South Johnson. Call Kelly (432)425-9994.

FOR SALE by Owner: Owner financing provided. Low down payment, will work with income tax refund, low monthly, 3 bedroom, 1216 Ridgeroad. Call Kelly 432-425-9994.

FOR SALE by Owner: Owner financing provided. Low down payment, low monthly, 3 bedroom, 500 1st St - Coahoma. Call Kelly 432-425-9994.

FOR SALE by Owner: Owner financing provided. Low down payment, will work with income tax refund, low monthly, 3 bedroom, 1321 Mulberry. Call Kelly 432-425-9994.

NO DOWN Payment on 2 thru 6 Bedroom Brick Homes. Owner Financing. Bad Credit OK. We can adjust your monthly payments to fit your Budget. Call Maria (432)263-3461.

ONE ACRE & small trailer in Forsan/ Elbow School District. Asking \$7,000 cash or rent to own. Call after 5:00 (432)816-6274.

Real Estate for Sale

RENT TO OWN. 4 Bedroom, 1 bath. Washer and Dryer Connection with fenced yard. Call (432)264-6611.

SALE/LEASE: 7906 South Service Road (Sand Springs), 4 Bedroom, 2 bath, CH/A on 13 acres. \$37,800.00 or \$450.00 a month. Call (325)695-6100 after 6:00 p.m.



SPACIOUS TWO-STORY home. 2150 sq. ft. 3 bedroom, 2 baths, office, 2 living areas, ash cabinets, fireplace. Gazebo, 2 storage bldgs., 3/4 acre, secluded. Lovely yard. \$110,00. Call (432)263-4080.

OWNER WILL FINANCE! 3 bedroom home. Just remodeled! Great condition! 1214 Ridgeroad. LOW DOWN, LOW MONTHLY! Tadlock Realtors (432)580-4883.

Vehicles

'04 Freestar Vans \$6000 Available Rebates Bob Brock Ford 500 W. 4th 267-7424

CHEVROLET VENTURE Extended Minivan, 1998. 96,000 miles, good condition, clean, beige/tan. AM/FM/cassette/CD. Power sliding door, windows, locks. \$5,000. (432)267-9605 after 6:00 p.m. leave message.

NOBODY ASKS FOR IT

Help STOP Sexual Assaults Call 263-3312 Rape Crisis Services/Big Spring

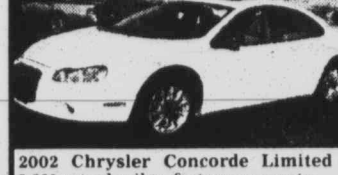
Vehicles



2001 F250 Powerstroke Lariat - Very Clean.....\$19,900



2001 Line Navigator 4WD - New Car Trade.....\$17,950



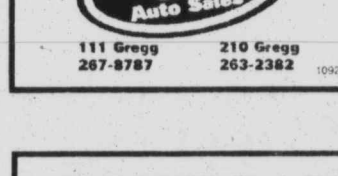
2002 Chrysler Concorde Limited - 5,800 actual miles, factory warranty.....\$14,950



2002 Ford Lariat Supercrew - 42K mint.....\$19,950



2000 Chevrolet Suburban LT - Quad Chairs, Nice.....\$13,950



111 Gregg 267-8787 210 Gregg 263-2382

Tomorrow's Horoscope

BY HOLIDAY MATHIS Happy Kwanzaa and Happy Boxing Day! It's a stellar day for acknowledging the people in your life who make things easier on a daily basis. With the full moon in Cancer, insecurity runs rampant, and grand gestures provide much-needed reassurance. Fortune befalls you when you remember people with small tokens of affection and big tips!

ARIES (March 21-April 19). The stars appoint you the cruise director. So when family and friends come to you with blank eyes, begging to be led in the direction of fun, be ready with suggestions. You'll be amazed how influential you are!

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). What do you need from others in order to feel safe and comfortable? The answers aren't on the tip of your tongue, but start talking anyway. When you bounce ideas off the right person, the light bulb over your head turns on.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). Recent events have enlightened you but have not caused you to be jaded. It's brilliant how you're able to hold on to your innocent wonder even when you know that this magic act is all done with smoke and mirrors.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). Emotional complexities vex others - not you. You understand that not every problem is meant to be solved. Friends compete for you. There's room for more than one number on your speed dial.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). Relationships aren't exactly glassy smooth now. But if you have to swim through some muck to get to love's lush island, you're willing to get a little dirty. True friendship and the promise of romance are worth the effort.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). Just when you thought you could relax, the bell rings, signaling that your break is over. Take comfort in the fact that the "work" you're doing is very much appreciated by your dear ones, and they'll tell you so, too!

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). Your mind is processing multiple layers of meaning from all of your surroundings. You'll see many symbols around you and wonder what they are symbolizing. Maybe something, maybe nothing. It's up to you.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). You would feel terrible if you knew your actions were really bothering someone. But the fact that this person isn't willing to speak up is your free pass. Consider bringing underlying tension out in the open.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). There are numerous benefits to be had by taking part in doing absolutely nothing. You do nothing passionately, almost actively. Doing nothing with a friend is even more fulfilling.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). Whatever the interruption, you turn it to your benefit. You'll be relieved when a responsibility is lifted or when a friend bails on you, leaving you plenty of time to ponder the meaning of life.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). You were promised that something would come, but the exact nature of that something was left vague. In fact, you have no idea what to expect. The suspense may not be killing you, but it is making you a bit anxious.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). You're a witness. You didn't mean to be or want to be, but now you are. What to do with your accidental knowledge is the question. Turning it into a secret and carrying it around is an option, but it will get awfully heavy!

Legals

NOTICE TO CONTRACTORS OF PROPOSED TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (TxDOT) CONTRACTS

Sealed proposals for contracts listed below will be received by TxDOT until the date (s) shown below, and then publicly read. CONSTRUCTION/ MAINTENANCE/ BUILDING FACILITIES CONTRACT(S)

Dist/ Div: Abilene Contract 6124-74-001 for LITTER REMOVAL in MITCHELL County, etc will be opened on January 27, 2005 at 10:30 am at the District Office for an estimate of \$28,164.00.

Plans and specifications are available for inspection, along with bidding proposals, and applications for the TxDOT Prequalified Contractor's list, at the applicable State and/or Dist/ Div Offices listed below. If applicable, bidders must submit prequalification information to TxDOT at least 10 days prior to the bid date to be eligible to bid on a project. Prequalification materials may be requested from the State Office listed below. Plans for the above contract(s) are available from TxDOT's website at www.dot.state.tx.us and from reproduction companies at the expense of the contractor. NPO: 15077

State Office Constr./ Maint. Division 200 E. Riverside Dr. Austin, Texas 78704 Phone: 512-416-2540 Dist/Div Office (s)

Abilene District Engineer 4250 N. Clack Abilene, Texas 79604-0150 Phone: 325-676-6800

Minimum wage rates are set out in bidding documents and the rates will be part of the contract. TxDOT ensures that bidders will not be discriminated against on the ground of race, color, sex, or national origin. #4412 December 19 & 26, 2004.

LEGAL NOTICE:

These Texas Lottery Commission scratch-off games will close on January 30, 2005. You have until July 29, 2005, to redeem any tickets for these games: #438 FIND THE 9'S (\$1) overall odds are 1 in 4.85, #440 SIZZLIN, 7'S (\$7) overall odds are 1 in 3.00, #444 GOLDEN RICHES (\$3) overall odds are 1 in 3.46, #447 SUPER DEUCES (\$2) overall odds are 1 in 4.34, #457 COR-VETTE® CASH (\$5) overall odds are 1 in 3.38, #458 RED HOT 5'S (\$2) overall odds are 1 in 4.30, #464 75 GRAND (\$5) overall odds are 1 in 3.27, #467 TEXAS STARS & GUITARS (\$1) overall odds are 1 in 4.81, #475 DOUBLE DOLLARS (\$1) overall odds are 1 in 4.62, #483 GLITTERING GOLD (\$2) overall odds are 1 in 4.48, #484 DELUXE 7-11-21 (\$2) overall odds are 1 in 3.94. The odds listed here are the overall odds of winning any prize in a game, including break-even prizes. Lottery retailers are authorized to redeem prizes of up to and including \$599. Prizes of \$600 or more must be claimed in person at a Lottery Claim Center or by mail with a completed Texas Lottery claim form; however, annuity prizes or prizes over \$999,999 must be claimed in person at the Commission Headquarters in Austin. Call Customer Service at 1-800-37-LOTTO or visit the Lottery Web site at www.tlottery.org for more information and location of nearest Claim Center. The Texas Lottery is not responsible for lost or stolen tickets, or for tickets lost in the mail. Tickets, transactions, players and winners are subject to, and players and winners agree to abide by, all applicable laws, Commission rules, regulations, policies, directives, instructions, conditions, procedures and final decisions of the Executive Director. A scratch-off game may continue to be sold even when all the top prizes have been claimed. Must be 18 years of age or older to purchase a Texas Lottery ticket. Play Responsibly. Remember, it's just a game. The Texas Lottery supports Texas education by contributing to the Foundation School Fund. #4418 December 26, 2004

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Announcements... Dear Readers... Christmas... That stren... courage ab... given to all... a world of r... understanding... That the go... in each of o... day by day... That we will... more clearly... which divides... which unites... That each... bring us close... victory, not of... nation, but o... over our own... weaknesses... That the tru... this Christmas... joy, its beauty... and above all... faith, may be... That the b... peace be ou... to build and g... in harmony a... thy with othe... plan for the... confidence... Dear Annie... many stories... dren who are... from their par... lings who are... another. Her... change for yo... When my hu... had our 50th... anniversary, ... children asked... wanted to cele... WE WILL NOT BE UNDERSOLD • WWW.BENNYBOYD.COM • WE WILL NOT BE UNDERSOLD • WE WILL NOT BE UNDERSOLD



# Annie's Mailbox®: Advice for those in need

Dear Readers: Today is Christmas, and we hope those who are celebrating this holiday are fortunate enough to enjoy it with family and friends. Here is a prayer that was sent to us over the Internet. We do not know who wrote it, but we think it expresses an appropriate sentiment for the season:

**A Christmas Prayer**  
Let us pray...  
That strength and courage abundant be given to all who work for a world of reason and understanding.

That the good that lies in each of our hearts may day by day be magnified.

That we will come to see more clearly not that which divides us, but that which unites us.

That each hour may bring us closer to a final victory, not of nation over nation, but of ourselves over our own evils and weaknesses.

That the true spirit of this Christmas Season, its joy, its beauty, its hope, and above all, its abiding faith, may be among us.

That the blessings of peace be ours, the peace to build and grow, to live in harmony and sympathy with others, and to plan for the future with confidence.

Dear Annie: You get so many stories about children who are estranged from their parents, or siblings who are cruel to one another. Here's a nice change for you:

When my husband and I had our 50th wedding anniversary, our four children asked us how we wanted to celebrate. I sug-



KATHY MITCHELL  
MARCY SUGAR

If your readers want to do something really special for their parents, they might consider a "work day" similar to ours. And, by the way, my sister and her husband sent us on a cruise to Alaska for our anniversary. What a family! — Feeling Blessed in Whittier, Calif.

Dear Whittier: You and your husband must be wonderful people to have family members who love you so dearly. Congratulations.

Dear Annie: You've printed letters about people not attending events because they can't afford a gift. I am the poor relative in my family. I make most of my Christmas presents. I bake a lot, buy small gifts on sale throughout the year and make decorative cards for Christmas.

When there are events that cost money, I usually say I can't make it. I don't want anyone to feel sorry for me. Sometimes, family or friends will treat me so I can go with them. The most important people in my life understand that money is tight. This Christmas season, I just want them to know how blessed I feel. — Anyone

Dear Anyone: Thank you for sharing your blessings with our readers today. Merry Christmas.

Dear Annie: This is in response to "Worried Grandma," whose 12-year-old grandson, "Zach," was having visions. Your immediate advice was for the boy to be hustled off to a neurologist. You have done this child a disservice by your knee-jerk

assumption that he has some type of mental problem.

There is another possibility that should not be overlooked: The boy may be psychic. Please take a look at the larger picture, and acknowledge the fact that there are those who have abilities far beyond yours and mine. — Paranormal Advocate

Dear Advocate: Many readers were confused that we recommended a neurologist, so let's clear that up. Visions such as those described by the grandmother could signal that the boy has a brain tumor or other neurological disorder. We felt it was necessary to rule out serious medical concerns, and that is why a neurologist was the appropriate referral. We heard from many readers who were convinced the boy's visions should be celebrated. Read on:

From California: My ESP started at 1 year of age, and it has been 50-plus years of dealing with others' biased attitudes. If you feel the urge to refer this family to a doctor, at least refer them to a parapsychologist.

Washington: As a child, I saw stacked translucent colored cubes. When I was older, I used to see a long-haired female folk singer strumming her guitar. I discovered these were "auras" before my panic attacks. I've been on an anti-anxiety antidepressant for years now with excellent results.

Madison, Wis.: Zach's visions could be past life regression. It is wonderful this teen was so intu-

itive and spiritual that he could remember a previous life without being regressed or hypnotized.

Bainbridge, N.Y.: Zach may have some incredible gifts that he should be taught to cherish. He should be put in touch with a religious community in which he could explore what may be a blossoming spirituality.

East Coast: When I moved into my new home, I had visions of an old woman with a skinny cat. It happened whenever I washed the dishes. I consulted a spiritual medium who told me I was seeing the former owner of the home. Ten years later, I met someone who knew the owner and said she had a cat and loved her kitchen.

Ventura, Calif.: My newly diagnosed epileptic daughter is photosensitive. Zach may very well be experiencing some sort of brief seizure. If the neurologist doesn't find anything, she should get an opinion from a specifically skilled expert. Grandma is to be commended for seeking further help, and her grandson's trust in her is well-placed.

Boston: Psychic phenomena are common in children and may indicate lifelong talent and interest. This kid deserves the immediate attention of both a medical doctor and a shaman or spiritualist minister.

Massachusetts: It may be possible that this boy is gifted with an ability to sense what are popularly called "guardian angels." These visions may actual-

ly be connections with his spirit guides.

No State: For as long as I can remember, I, too, have had visions. The person I saw the most was my beloved grandfather who died tragically. Grandpa checked in on me frequently as I grew up, and it was comforting to know he was not really "dead."

Up North: I am Native American and have a job in the social work field. You gave excellent advice in regard to seeking professional help to diagnose any medical problems, but Western medicine is not always the cure. He should also seek a traditional healer or a spiritual guide. Grandma could contact a local Tribe or Band and inquire about a reliable traditional healer.

Annie's Mailbox is written by Kathy Mitchell and Marcy Sugar, longtime editors of the Ann Landers column. Please e-mail your questions to anniesmailbox@comcast.net, or write to: Annie's Mailbox, P.O. Box 118190, Chicago, IL 60611. 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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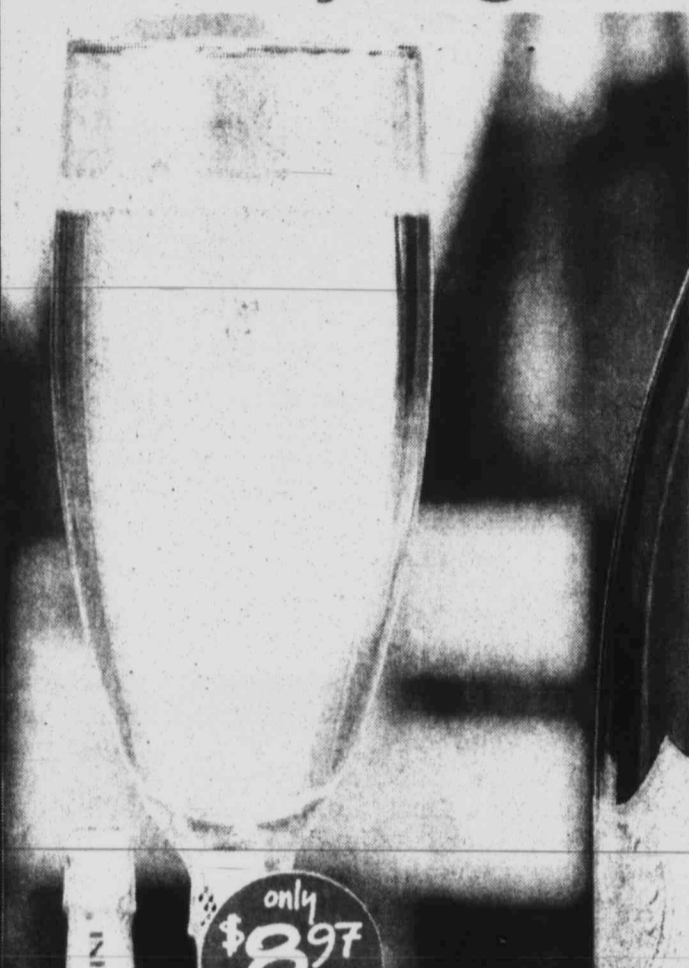
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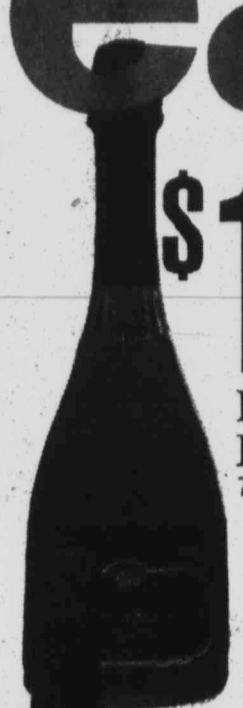
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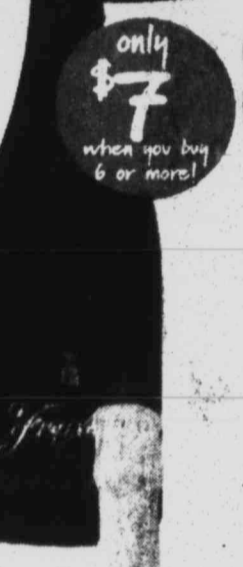
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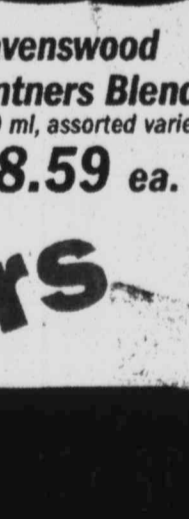
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