



BIG SPRING

HERALD

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Big Sky — Big Heart — Big Spring

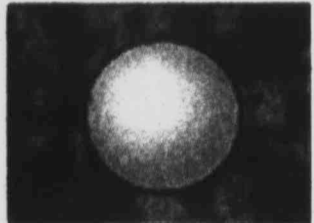
50 CENTS DAILY/\$1.25 WEEKEND

MONDAY

December 27, 2004

WEATHER

Tonight:



TONIGHT 34°-36° TOMORROW 58°-62°

Online casino strikes again, buying naughty childrens' gifts

HOUSTON (AP) — An online casino that bought a cheese sandwich said to bear the Virgin Mary's image and a plate that supposedly came from the Titanic has struck again — this time paying a man \$5,300 for his naughty children's Christmas gifts.

The Pasadena man said last week that he decided to auction the three Nintendo DS game systems because his sons, ages 9, 11, and 15, had misbehaved.

The family's decision made national headlines, intriguing GoldenPalace.com, casino spokesman Monty Kerr said.

"Everybody knows Santa doesn't come to naughty kids," Kerr said Sunday.

The man, speaking on condition of anonymity, said his family will use the money to buy a new heating system for his Pasadena church. He said he was shocked by the attention his story received.

"When doing what is normal and standard in childrearing by teaching your children good, honest family values and giving them a sense of accountability becomes a newsworthy item, what does that say about America today?" he said.

The casino, which has paid about \$108,000 for eBay oddities in just more than a month, plans to donate the game systems to a needy Houston family, Kerr said.

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Find us online at: www.bigspringherald.com

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.

Death toll from quake, tsunami reaches 21,000

By DILIP GANGULY

Associated Press Writer

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka — Rescuers piled up bodies along coastlines devastated by a tsunami that obliterated seaside towns in Asia and Africa, killing 21,000 people in nine countries. Hundreds of children were buried in mass graves in India, and morgues and hospitals struggled Monday to cope with the catastrophe.

The death toll rose sharply a day after the magnitude 9 quake

struck deep beneath the Indian Ocean off the coast of Indonesia. It was the most powerful earthquake in the world in four decades.

Walls of water sped away from the epicenter at more than 500 mph before crashing into the region's shorelines, sweeping people and fishing villages out to sea. Millions were displaced from their homes and thousands remained missing Monday.

The governments of Indonesia and Thailand conceded that public warnings came too late or not

at all. But officials insisted they could not know the seriousness of the threat because no tsunami warning system exists for the Indian Ocean.

Officials said the death toll would continue to rise, and the international Red Cross said it was concerned about waterborne diseases.

Sri Lanka said more than 10,000 people were killed along its coastlines, and Tamil rebels said 2,000 people died in its territory, raising that country's toll to more than 12,000.

Indonesia reported about 5,000 deaths and India 3,000. Thailand — a Western tourist hotspot — said hundreds of people were dead and thousands more were missing. Deaths also were reported in Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Somalia, 3,000 miles away in Africa.

On the remote Car Nicobar island northwest of Sumatra, Police Chief S.B. Deol told New Delhi Television he had reports

See **QUAKE**, Page 3A

SALVATION ARMY CHRISTMAS DINNER



Dixie Daves, left, and Brandon Burleson prepare a holiday meal at the Salvation Army offices on West Fifth Street Friday morning. The Salvation Army distributed an estimated 250 meals to local residents on Christmas Eve.

Herald photo/Steve Reagan

Short week for those who close this Friday

By THOMAS JENKINS

Staff Writer

As the holiday season continues, many area agencies and businesses will be closing their doors to celebrate the new year.

The Herald office will be closed Friday, reopening at 8 a.m. Monday. The paper for New Year's Eve will be delivered at its normal time.

The city of Big Spring will close all offices, including the municipal landfill and compost facility, on Friday in observance of New Year's Day. There will be no sanitation collection that day.

As many people prepare to enjoy a day off for New Years, area emergency personnel will be bracing themselves for the inevitable holiday onslaught. Local agencies including the Big Spring Police Department, Fire Department, Emergency Medical Services and Howard County Sheriff's Office, all report the special day will be busier for them, as they pay spe-

See **CLOSING**, Page 3A

City will accept holiday trees at landfill, compost facility

By THOMAS JENKINS

Staff Writer

Once the presents have been unwrapped and the Christmas meal has been eaten, many area residents may find themselves faced with a holiday dilemma: What do I do with my Christmas tree?

The city of Big Spring has the answer that will not only help area residents get their trees out of their homes, but also make a contribution to the environment, one wood chip



"If someone puts their tree in a dumpster or next to the dumpster, we won't pick it up."

—Kenny Davis

at a time.

"We'll be collecting the Christmas trees in containers at the municipal landfill and the

city compost facility," said Kenny Davis, landfill supervisor.

Davis said the seasonal effort is two-fold. "The compost facility will grind the trees up to be used in the compost," he said. "That way we're recycling them and not just throwing them in the landfill. The other reason we do this is to keep people from putting the trees in their dumpsters. When people put them in their dumpsters they get stuck and

See **TREES**, Page 3A

Suicide bomber kills 15, wounds dozens in attack

By BASSEM MROUE

Associated Press Writer

BAGHDAD, Iraq — A suicide bomber detonated his car Monday at the gate of the home of the leader of Iraq's biggest political party, killing 15 people and injuring dozens, police said. The cleric was unharmed.

Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, head of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq — the country's most powerful Shiite political group — was in his res-

idence in Baghdad's Jadiriya district when the attack occurred, said his spokesman, Haitham al-Husseini.

The blast, which shook the district and sent a cloud of smoke high above the area, killed 15 people and injured at least 50, said police Capt. Ahmed Ismail. Thirty-two cars on the street and near the gates were destroyed or damaged.

"It was a suicide attack near the gate leading to the office," al-Husseini said. "Several of the

guards were killed and wounded."

Hakim also heads the candidate list of the 228-member United Iraqi Alliance coalition, which is expected to dominate Iraq's new constitutional assembly following the first free elections on Jan. 30. The coalition is supported by Iraq's top Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani.

Al-Hakim's son, Ammar, accused Saddam Hussein's followers of being behind the suicide attack.

"They are the remains of the dead regime and their allies who carried out similar criminal acts in the past," he said, adding that many of the blast victims were innocent civilians who happened to be on the street when the explosion occurred.

The residence, where Hakim has his home and offices, was previously the house of Tariq Aziz, a jailed former senior aide to Saddam Hussein who has been

See **IRAQ**, Page 3A

Newspaper: Scores of Texas nurses are drug, sex offenders

AUSTIN (AP) — Scores of licensed nurses in Texas are convicted drug and sex offenders, and some of them are working in violation of state law, a newspaper investigation has found.

An analysis by The Dallas Morning News found that 57 licensed Texas nurses are felony sex offenders, including 31 who are listed in the state sex-offender registry. About 140 nurses have felony drug records,

and about half of them hold current nursing licenses.

In one case, teacher Shellie Jordan was sentenced to five years deferred adjudication for fondling one of his fifth-graders in San Antonio. Authorities recommended he no longer teach kids, and the state revoked his teaching license.

But no one restricted the vocational nursing license he also held. Jordan, registered as a

"You probably don't want somebody who is a registered sex offender being alone with you in a room where you are probably not completely dressed."

sex offender, successfully completed his community supervision and returned

to nursing.

Now, at the community health clinic where he works, Jordan spends about half his time working with young children seeking immunizations. He said he understands concern about whether he should be working as a nurse.

"I can see your point," he said.

But, he added, "all it was, was an allegation." He said he pleaded guilty because "that was the

best thing for me at the time. It's not actually that I'd done anything or harmed a child."

However, the mother of Jordan's victim said she is outraged he is working with children again.

"This man has no business being around any children, period," she said.

There are about 500,000 licensed nurses in Texas. About half of the licenses

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Obituaries

Cleta Plew



Cleta Plew, 96, of Big Spring died Sunday morning Dec. 26, 2004, at her home. Funeral services will be at 11 a.m. Tuesday at Myers & Smith Chapel with Ralph Anderson, minister of Birdwell Lane Church of Christ, officiating. Burial will be in Trinity Memorial Park.

She was born Aug. 16, 1908, in Altus, Okla. She was the daughter Lewis Isaac Dial and Lola Catherine Kempf Dial. She married Earl Plew, July 3 1927, in Altus, Okla. Mr. and Mrs. Plew owned and operated Plew's Fina Service Station and Grocery Store from 1945 until 1974. Mr. Plew passed away Feb. 12, 1988. Mrs. Plew was a member of the Birdwell Lane Church of Christ and the Rebekah Lodge.

She is survived by two sons, Billy Plew and his wife, Peggy of Big Spring and Kenneth Plew and his wife, Betty of Antioch, Calif.; one daughter, Louise Blalack and her husband, Gary of Boerne; one halfsister, Lavena Elliott of Bakersfield, Calif.; one halfbrother, Clyde Dial of Dallas; six grandchildren, Roger Plew of Dallas, Gary Plew and his wife, Kim of Big Spring, Tammy Pointon and her husband, Malcolm of Lazaro Cardenas, Mexico, Tim Plew and his wife, Paula of Santa Fe, Tina Fell and her husband, William of Anchorage, Alaska and Chris Blalack of Boerne; 11 great-grandchildren; and one great-great-grandson.

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

Paid obituary

Maxine Howard



Maxine Howard, 81, of Stanton died Saturday, Dec. 25, 2004, in a Midland hospital. Funeral services will be held at 2 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 28, 2004, at the Nalley-Pickle & Welch Rosewood Chapel in Big Spring with Bill Welsh, minister of Belvue Church of Christ in Stanton, officiating. Interment will follow at Trinity Memorial Park in Big Spring.

The family will receive friends today, Dec. 27, from 6 p.m. until 8 p.m. at her home in Stanton, 803 N. St. Francis.

She was born Oct. 12, 1923, in Jones County to Ernest and Carrie Mims. The family moved to Martin County in 1929, where she attended Courtney School. She married Homer Howard Jr. Nov. 7, 1942, in Big Spring. He preceded her in death March 7, 1968.

Maxine and her husband farmed in the Tarzan community. She was a homemaker and did secretarial work for the Guitar Gin of Stanton, the agricultural office and M&M Meter Service of Stanton. She loved yard work, gardening, crocheting and most of all, baking for her family and the elderly. She was a member of Belvue Church of Christ.

Survivors include four sons and three daughters-in-law, Butch and LaRee Howard of Tarzan, John L. Howard of Midland, Danny and Nancy Howard of Ackerly and Bill and Cynthia Howard of Midland; five grandsons; four granddaughters; and six great-grandchildren.

She was also preceded in death by her parents and two brothers.

The family suggests memorials to the Martin County Senior Citizens P.O. Box 1233, Stanton 79782 or to a favorite charity.

Arrangements under the direction of Gilbreath Funeral Home of Stanton. Online condolences can be made at www.npwelch.com.

Paid obituary

Viola Hawthorne Daw



Viola Hawthorne Daw, 93, of Abilene, formerly of Big Spring, died Saturday, Dec. 25, 2004, in an Abilene convalescent center.

A graveside service will be 11 a.m. Tuesday, Dec. 28, 2004, in Elmwood Memorial Park with Reverend Lee Fuller officiating.

Viola was born April 3, 1911, to Mary Elizabeth (Dykes) and William Hawthorne in Geneva County, Ala. She married Oscar Daw. The moved to Abilene from Big Spring in 1957. She was a very active member of the Lady's Home League with the Salvation Army and was a member of the Salvation Army Church. Viola was a homemaker and a very devoted and loving mother, grandmother and great-grandmother.

She was preceded in death by her parents, her husband June 21, 1993, and a daughter, Barbara Ann Letz.

Survivors include a son, Leslie Daw and wife, Sue of Abilene; four daughters, Myrt Thornton and husband, Otis of Big Spring, Naomi Head of Abilene, Jean Moore and husband, Jimmy of Big Spring and Judy Belyeu and husband, Paul of Abilene; two sisters, Rushie Schad of Brewton, Ala., and Mavis Harris of Old Town, Fla.; 16 grandchildren; and 41 great-grandchildren.

Memorials may be sent to Hospice of the Big Country, 4601 Hartford, Abilene 79605.

Arrangements are under the direction of Elliott-Hamil Funeral Home in Abilene.

Paid obituary

Weather

Tonight - Partly cloudy. Lows in the mid 30s. South winds near 10 mph.
Tuesday - Partly cloudy. Highs near 60. South winds near 10 mph.
Tuesday night - Mostly cloudy. Lows near 40. South winds 10 to 15 mph.
Wednesday - Mostly cloudy. Highs near 60. Southeast winds 10 to 15 mph.
Wednesday night - Partly cloudy. Lows in the mid 40s.
Thursday - Mostly cloudy with isolated showers. Highs in the mid 60s.
Thursday night - Partly cloudy. Lows near 40.

Frances Mims

Frances Mims, 78, of Cisco died Friday, Dec. 24, 2004, in an Eastland hospital. Graveside funeral services are 11 a.m. Tuesday, Dec. 28, 2004, at the Evergreen Cemetery Chapel in Stanton with Van Pendergrass, minister of the Downtown Church of Christ officiating.

The family will receive friends today, Dec. 27, from 5 p.m. until 7 p.m. at the funeral home.

She was born Oct. 10, 1926, in Royce City to Charlie and Irene Matthews and married Douglas Mims Jan. 4, 1947, in Midland. She was a homemaker and a member of the First Baptist Church of Stanton.

Survivors include her husband, Douglas Mims of Cisco; her daughter and son-in-law, Sandra and Don Dickenson of Abilene; one sister, Crentell Simmons of West Point, Miss.; and numerous nieces, nephews and cousins.

She was preceded in death by her parents and two brothers.

The family suggests memorials to a charity of one's choice.

Arrangements under the direction of Gilbreath Funeral Home of Stanton.

Online condolences can be made at www.npwelch.com.

Milini Turner

Milini Turner, 51, of Big Spring died Monday morning, Dec. 27, 2004, at Scenic Mountain Medical Center. Services are pending at Myers & Smith Funeral Home.

Conny Wade

Conny Wade, 81, of Big Spring died Monday morning, Dec. 27, 2004, at Mountain View Lodge. Services are pending at Myers & Smith Funeral Home.

Clara Dierschke

Clara Dierschke, 88, of Garden City died Saturday, Dec. 25, 2004, in a Stanton nursing home. Her services are pending with Nalley-Pickle & Welch Funeral Home & Crematory of Big Spring.

Take note

□ **SENIOR CITIZEN'S NEW YEAR'S EVE DANCE** Dec. 31 at the Spring City Senior Citizens. Monroe Casey's "Prowlers" 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 LaForce 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.

□ **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.

Lottery

Results of the Cash 5 drawing Saturday night:
Winning numbers drawn: 33-35-12-7-31.
Number matching five of five: 1.
Prize per winner: \$27,725.
Winning tickets sold in: Granbury.
Next Cash 5 drawing: Monday night.

Results of the Lotto Texas drawing Saturday night:
Winning numbers drawn: 10-12-13-20-21. Bonus Ball: 36.
Estimated jackpot for Wednesday night drawing: \$36 million.

The winning Pick 3 numbers drawn Saturday night by the Texas Lottery, in order: 4-4-1

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COUPON

Bulletin board

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

TODAY

• 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.

• Prospector's Club work night begins at 7 p.m. at 606 E. Third.

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.

• Wednesday, Thursday and Friday

These are fifth weekdays for December and no meetings are planned. To have a meeting placed in Bulletin Board for these days, contact 263-7331, ext. 236.

MONDAY

• District Committee Lone Star of Big Spring meets at noon at 610 Scurry.

• 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.

Police blotter

The Big Spring Police Department reported the following activity between 10 a.m. Saturday and 8 a.m. today:

• **ANDREA ALENDER**, 32, of 700 E. 15th Street, was arrested Saturday on a charge of disorderly conduct-language.

• **HEATHER HOUSTON**, 20, of 3304 W. Highway 80, was arrested Saturday on a local warrant.

• **CODY CLAYTON**, 18, of 1505 Owens, was arrested Saturday on a charge of failure to display court order on OCC license.

• **APRIL NOEL SHORTT**, 28, of Highland, was arrested Saturday and held for the HCOS.

• **JOHNNY RAY TORRES**, 23, of 508 S. Benton, was arrested Saturday on a charge of driving while license suspended.

• **ASSAULT/CLASS C** was reported in the 1900 block of Highway 87.

• **BURGLARY OF A HABITATION** was reported in the 400 block of Owens.

• **THEFT** was reported:

- in the 300 block of Owens.
- in the 1100 block of Lamesa.
- in the 400 block of Birdwell Lane.
- in the 800 block of Interstate Highway 20.
- in the 1200 block of 11th Place.

Sheriff's report

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

• **TRAFFIC ACCIDENT** was reported near the 173 mile marker of Interstate Highway 20.

• **BURGLARY OF A HABITATION** was reported in the 2600 block of Neil Road.

• **DOMESTIC DISTURBANCE** was reported in the 1100 block of Highway 176.

BIG SPRING HERALD

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NURSES

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QUAKE

Continued from Pa

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TREES

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CLOSING

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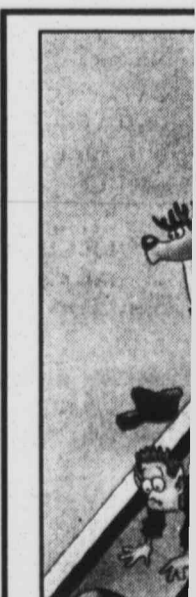
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The Shiites, up about 60 Iraq's 26 mill have traditio dominated by minority, whi fo- about a population. Th are eager to tr numerical

into political next month's first free elec the overthru monarchy 45 : In another



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NURSES

Continued from Page 1A

are current. Many of the rest have lapsed but could be activated easily if the nurse pays a fee or enrolls in professional coursework.

Texas prohibits felony offenders from working as nurses if they have gone to prison. The news-

paper found 58 nurses who have been incarcerated for felony sex or drug offenses whose licenses have not been surrendered or revoked.

The state board that licenses nurses conducts few background checks, in part because there is not enough money to do so. Instead, state officials rely on nurses to self-report their criminal con-

victions. Katherine Thomas, executive director of the Texas Board of Nurse Examiners, acknowledged that the agency "may not be aware" of nurses who have not self-reported their records. She said the board "would like an opportunity to investigate."

The Texas Hospital Association, which repre-

sents about 85 percent of the state's hospitals, said most hospitals perform their own background checks. But they are not required by law to do so. And most doctors' offices and clinics probably do not check nurses' backgrounds, Thomas said.

It's impossible to know whether any of the felons are harming patients, but victims' rights advocates

questioned whether it is appropriate for them to be nurses.

"You probably don't want somebody who is a registered sex offender being alone with you in a room where you are probably not completely dressed," said Kristianne Hinkamp, executive director of the Dallas group Victims Outreach. However people who

help rehabilitate sex offenders say a blanket ban would go too far.

"Just because someone is convicted of a sex crime does not determine their dangerousness," said Allison Taylor, executive director of the Texas Council on Sex Offender Treatment. "We've really got to look at who is dangerous and who is not."

QUAKE

Continued from Page 1A

that another 3,000 people may have died. If confirmed, that would raise India's death toll to 6,000 and the overall number to 23,900.

"The Andaman and Nicobar islands have been really badly hit," said Hakan Sandbladh, senior health officer at the Geneva headquarters of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Officers of aid poured in from around the globe, as troops in the region struggled to deliver urgently needed aid to afflicted areas.

In Bandah Aceh, Indonesia, 150 miles from the quake's epicenter, dozens of bloated bodies littered the streets as soldiers and desperate relatives searched for survivors Monday. Some 500 bodies collected by emergency workers lay under

plastic tents, rotting in the tropical heat.

"We have ordered 15,000 troops into the field to search for survivors," Indonesian military spokesman Edy Sulistiadi said. "They are mostly retrieving corpses."

Refugees in nearby Lhokseumawe, many of whom had spent the night sleeping outside on open ground, complained that little or no aid had reached them. The city's hospital said it was running out of medicine.

The Indian state of Tamil Nadu reported thousands of deaths. Chief Minister Jayaram Jayalithaa called the scene "an extraordinary calamity of such colossal proportions that the damage has been unprecedented."

Nearby beaches resembled open-air mortuaries as fishermen's bodies washed ashore, and retreating waters left behind others killed inland. In Cuddalore, red-eyed parents buried more than 150 children

laid in a mass grave that a bulldozer filled with sodden earth.

The tsunamis came without warning. Witnesses said sea waters at first retreated far out into the ocean, only to return at a vicious pace. Some regions reported a crashing wall of water 20 feet high.

"The water went back, back, back, so far away, and everyone wondered what it was — a full moon or what? Then we saw the wave come, and we ran," said Katri Seppanen, who was in Thailand, on Phuket island's popular Patong beach.

Sri Lanka and Indonesia said at least 1 million people were driven from their homes in each country. Warships in Thailand steamed to remote tropical island resorts to search for survivors as air force helicopters in Sri Lanka and India rushed food and medicine to stricken areas.

In Indonesia, villagers near northern Lhokseumawe picked through the debris of their ruined houses amid the smell of

decomposing bodies.

One man, Rajali, said his wife and two children were killed and he could not find dry ground to bury them. Islamic tradition demands that the deceased be buried as soon as possible.

"What shall I do?" said the 55-year-old man, who, like many Indonesians, goes by a single name. "I don't know where to bury my wife and children."

Dozens of bodies still clad in swimming trunks lined beaches in Thailand.

In Sri Lanka — an island nation some 1,000 miles west of the epicenter — about 25,000 troops were deployed to crack down on sporadic, small-scale looting and to help in rescue efforts. About 200 inmates took advantage of the chaos, escaping from a prison in coastal Matara.

The U.S. Geological Survey said the quake's magnitude was 9.0 — the strongest since a 9.2-magnitude temblor in Alaska in

1964 and the fourth-largest in a century.

The quake occurred more than 6 miles deep and was followed by a half-dozen powerful aftershocks. A 620-mile section of a geological plate shifted, triggering the sudden displacement of water.

Countries around the world were touched. Italy reported 11 of its citizens had died; Norway 10; Britain four; the United States and Denmark three each; Australia, France, Sweden and Belgium two each; and New Zealand one.

Those numbers likely would rise. Sri Lanka said 72 foreign tourists were killed there, and Thailand said 35 of the dead were foreigners.

President Bush expressed his condolences over the "terrible loss of life and suffering." From the Vatican, Pope John Paul II led appeals for aid for victims, and the 25-nation European Union promised to quickly deliver \$4 million.

TREES

Continued from Page 1A

cause a serious us."

For those who choose to dispose of their trees in dumpsters, Davis said the results could get serious.

"If someone puts their tree in next to the dumpster, we won't pick it up,"

he said. "We'll simply notify code enforcement and let them handle it."

Davis said dropping your tree off at the landfill is free of charge, and there are only a few simple guidelines to follow.

"We need people to make sure all of the lights and ornaments are off the tree," he explained.

"We also can't take it if it's still wrapped in plastic or anything like that. You also need to make sure the tree stand has been

taken off. Once they drop it off, we'll take it from there."

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

CLOSING

Continued from Page 1A

cial attention to motorists and party-goers. The police department's main office will be closed Friday, and will reopen at 8 a.m. Monday.

County employees will get time to spend with their friends and family as well, as the Howard County Courthouse and its corresponding departments prepare to close for New Year's Eve. The offices located at the courthouse are expected to close all day Friday,

reopening as normal on Monday.

Those looking for party supplies at the last minute will be relieved to know the local Wal-Mart Supercenter, which is open 24-hours, will be open throughout the holiday. H-E-B will also be taking the holiday in

stride, adhering to its normal 6 a.m. until midnight schedule on both New Year's Eve and New Year's Day.

Keeping with their 24-hour, 365-day image, local 7-11 convenience stores will also be open throughout the New Year holiday.

If you're expecting a package in the mail, you'll be glad to know the Big Spring Post Office will be delivering mail as usual on Friday. There will be no mail delivery New Year's Day. The post office will be back in action at 8 a.m. on Monday.

The Spring City Senior Citizens Center will be closed Friday in observance of the holiday, reopening Monday at 8 a.m.

Contact Staff Writer Thomas Jenkins at 263-7331 ext. 232 or by e-mail at newsdesk@crcom.net

IRAQ

Continued from Page 1A

in prison since April last year.

Political and religious leaders of the Shiite community, who strongly back the holding of next month's vote, have been repeatedly targeted by the mainly Sunni Muslim insurgents since Saddam's ouster.

The Shiites, who make up about 60 percent of Iraq's 26 million people, have traditionally been dominated by the Sunni minority, which accounts for about a fifth of the population. Their leaders are eager to translate that numerical superiority into political power after next month's ballot — the first free elections since the overthrow of the monarchy 45 years ago.

In another blow to

Washington's plans for the upcoming elections, the largest Sunni Muslim political party that had planned to take part in the Jan. 30 ballot announced Monday it was pulling out of the race because of the rapidly deteriorating security situation and the lack of public awareness about the vote.

"The security situation keeps going from bad to worse and has to be dealt with," said Mohsen Abdel-Hamid, the Iraqi Islamic Party's leader.

In August 2003, a suicide bomber killed Ayatollah Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim, elder brother of Abdul Aziz and former leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq.

Like his late brother, Abdul Aziz Al-Hakim is a Shiite cleric who opposed Saddam Hussein from

exile in Iran before returning to Iraq after last year's U.S.-led invasion.

Meanwhile, a U.S. soldier died of wounds Monday and another was injured in a roadside bomb explosion in Samarra, 60 miles north of Baghdad, the U.S. military said in a statement.

The latest casualty brings to at least 1,324 the number of U.S. troops who have died in Iraq since the beginning of the war in March 2003.

The violence came a day after the Iraqi militant group Ansar al-Sunnah Army posted a video on the Internet purportedly showing footage from last week's suicide attack at a U.S. base in Mosul. The group claimed that the bomber slipped into the base through a hole in the fence during a guard change.

The footage showed a

black-garbed gunman wearing an explosives belt around his body — apparently the suicide bomber, identified in the tape as Abu Omar al-Mosuli — bidding farewell to his comrades. The video gives no further details about the bomber beyond his name.

The Ansar al-Sunnah Army had earlier said it would release a video of last Tuesday's attack, which killed 22 people, including 18 U.S. service members and civilian contractors.

The bombing — the deadliest attack on a U.S. base in Iraq — has prompted a U.S. military investigation into how the bomber got onto the heavily guarded site and how security at bases can be improved.

In the first section of the video — with a time signature of Dec. 20, a day before the attack — three

gunmen wearing black masks and clothes and holding automatic rifles are shown sitting in front of a black banner with the group's name on it. One of them, apparently al-Mosuli, sits on the left, wearing an explosives belt.

The gunman in the center reads a statement describing how the attack will be carried out. The authenticity of the video could not be independently verified.

The two men then embrace the one wearing the explosives belt.

An image then shows a map of the base, as one of the gunmen points out locations using a military knife. One location is marked "the dining hall" in Arabic.

A later outdoor video image — shot on Tuesday, when the attack occurred — shows a fireball rising from the distance with

the accompanying sound of the explosion. A final image — shot from a vehicle driving past the base — shows the torn white tent that served as the base mess hall.

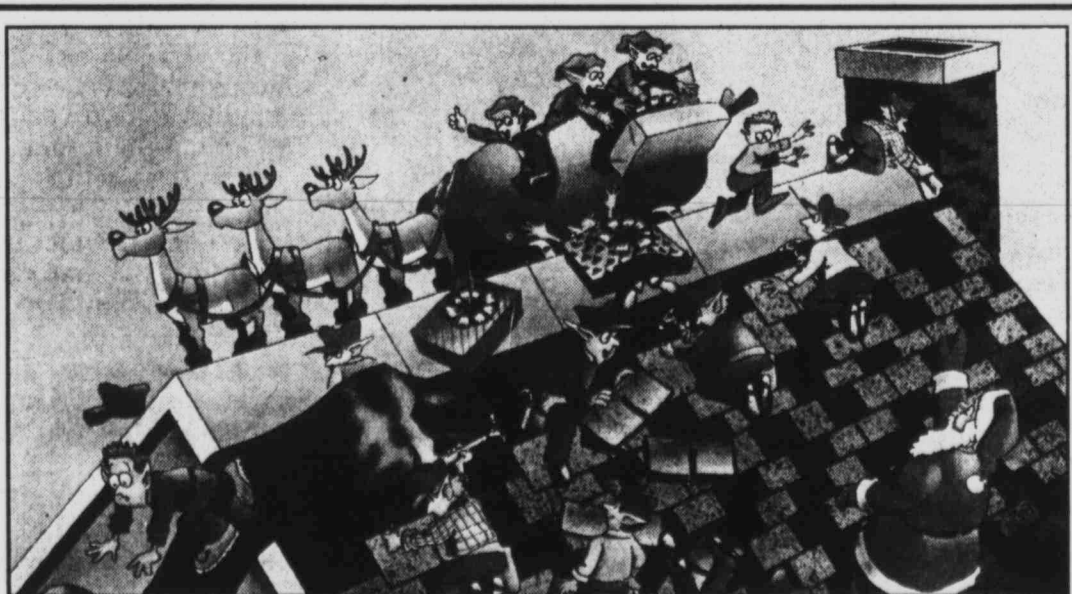
MYERS & SMITH FUNERAL HOME & CHAPEL

263-8288

Edna Hopper, 92, died Tuesday. Funeral Services were at 11:00 AM Monday at Myers & Smith Chapel. Burial will be at Trinity Memorial Park.

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

Cleta Plew, 96, died Sunday. Funeral Services will be at 11:00 AM Tuesday at Myers & Smith Chapel with burial at Trinity Memorial Park.



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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
Publisher

John A. Moseley
Managing Editor

Bill McClellan
News Editor

OUR VIEWS

Now is the time to develop your leadership skills

A community never has enough leaders — people that are not only willing, but both capable and knowledgeable to step to the forefront. That is why the Big Spring Area Chamber of Commerce annually conducts its Leadership Big Spring program.

And now is the time to sign up for next year's Leadership Big Spring class.

The chamber is accepting applications for the program which will begin Jan. 13, 2005, and those wishing to take part must register by the deadline of 5 p.m. Tuesday.

Applications are available at the chamber office, 215 W. Third, or chamber staff can send them to interested people by fax or e-mail if they are called at 263-7641.

Debye Valverde, chamber executive director, said the program is designed to help participants develop and increase leadership skills while they learn more about the community.

"It helps people see what they can do to make Big Spring a better place," Valverde said. "Hopefully they find an area where they can serve the community and start a habit that will continue for a long time."

Participants meet the second Thursday of each month for nine months. They hear presentations from community leaders and business people, tour local industries and educational facilities, and study the most current management theories.

Leadership Big Spring is designed for people who have demonstrated management and leadership ability, shown an interest in community affairs and have time and talent to offer. They must be willing to give one day out of each month, January through May and August through November, for the program.

Tuition is \$300, which includes transportation, meals and materials. The program is limited to the first 25 registered participants.

Leadership Big Spring has provided a number of dedicated citizens for various service organizations and boards over the years, and since 2003 each class has completed a service project together.

We encourage those with an interest to contact the chamber and become a part of the 2005 class of Leadership Big Spring.

Both you and our community will be the better for it.

HOW TO CONTACT US

The Herald is always interested in our readers' opinions. In order that we might better serve your needs, we offer several ways in which you may contact us:

- In person at 710 Scurry St.
- By telephone at 263-7331
- By fax at 264-7205
- By e-mail Managing Editor John A. Moseley at editor@bigspringherald.com or News Editor Bill McClellan at newsdesk@crcom.net.
- By mail at P.O. Box 1431, Big Spring, 79721

LETTER POLICIES

- The Herald welcomes letters to the editor.
- Limit your letters to no more than 300 words.
- Sign your letter.
- Provide a daytime telephone number, as well as a street address for verification purposes.
- We reserve the right to edit for style and clarity.
- We reserve the right to limit publication to one letter per 30-day period per author.
- Letters that are unsigned or do not include a telephone number or address will not be considered.
- Letters should be submitted to Editor, Big Spring Herald, P.O. Box 1431, Big Spring, 79721. They can also be e-mailed to editor@bigspringherald.com

Iraq: Danger on so many fronts

Weren't we supposed to be winning this thing?

Weren't we supposed to be wrapping up our occupation of Iraq about now and bringing the troops home?

Yes, we were. Last year, our military planners estimated that we would be withdrawing from Iraq this month.

After all, President Bush said in May 2003 that major combat operations in Iraq had ended. Remember what the banner behind him proclaimed? It was: "Mission Accomplished."

But try telling that to anybody in Mosul today, where 19 of our troops were blown up recently in an attack inside a U.S. military base.

Inside the base! So you can imagine how dangerous it is for U.S. troops outside the base.

Want an even more chilling thought? This is from Jeffrey White, former Defense Intelligence Agency analyst of Middle Eastern military affairs, quoted in The Washington Post: "The real danger here is that they (the insurgents) will mount a sophisticated effort to penetrate or assault one of our camps or bases with a ground element."

I'll translate: The real danger is that the insurgents will attack one of our bases in force and kill our troops.

According to the estimates I have seen, there are anywhere

from three dozen to 50 insurgent groups operating in Iraq today. By general consensus, they are fighting a far more ferocious, far more sophisticated war than anyone on our side anticipated.

Consider: We have tanks, and they do not. We have planes, and they do not. We have heavy artillery, and they do not. We have helicopters, and they do not. We have sophisticated satellite and other electronic intelligence-gathering, and they do not.

But they are blowing us up, anyway.

How bad is it? So bad that even George Bush, who rarely, if ever, admits to self-doubt, let alone making a mistake, sounded very grim in his press conference this week when it came to the insurgency.

Bush said we would win in the end. "But no question about it," he said. "The bombers are having an effect." And this was before the attack on Mosul.

Unlike Vietnam, where we seemed to have no working definition of victory (except the death of everyone fighting against us), we have tried for a realistic goal in Iraq: the day when the Iraqis are willing and able to fight for themselves against the insurgents.

So how is that going? How are Iraqi military units doing?

"Now, I would call the results mixed," Bush said, "in terms of standing up Iraqi units who are willing to fight. There have been some cases where when the heat got on, they left the battlefield. That's unacceptable. Iraq will never secure itself if they have troops that when the heat gets on,

they leave the battlefield. I fully understand that."

There may be something else worth understanding from the Iraqi view: As long as U.S. troops are fighting and dying for the Iraqis, why should Iraqi troops bother?

Perhaps only when the United States gets serious about leaving Iraq will Iraqis get serious about defending the place.

Because there is but one real question left about this war: How many more U.S. lives is Iraq worth?

The official White House position is: As many as it takes for victory.

How many will that be? Nobody knows.

This is from retired Marine Lt. Col. Jay Stout, who fought in the first Gulf War, when asked by The Washington Post what our strategy in Iraq should be.

"We have few choices," he said. "We can maintain the status quo while trying to build an Iraqi government that will survive, we can get the hell out now and leave them to kill themselves, or we can adopt a more brutal and repressive stance."

His recommendation? "I don't know the right answer," he said. "I gave up guessing a few months ago."

To find out more about Roger Simon, and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate web page at www.creators.com.
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McCain not the average republican

Why is John McCain so popular? It's a question I asked the maverick Republican senator from Arizona in his office Thursday. His answers were prickly: still, the former Vietnam POW is a compelling figure.

Global warming? I note that

McCain was one of 95 senators who voted for a 1997 resolution advising the Clinton administration not to agree to a Kyoto global-warming pact if it excluded developing nations such as China and India. Today, McCain is a champion for legislation to reduce U.S. greenhouse-gas emissions.

"That's probably one of the least understood votes in history," said McCain, as he explained the wrongheadedness of penalizing U.S. industry while exempting large countries that could pollute with impunity. (Since Vice President Al Gore nonetheless accepted exempting developing nations, I think it is fair to say that those 95 senators voted against the Kyoto Protocol.)

I'd like to hear McCain then say that the United States should pass regulations that reduce greenhouse-gas emissions in order to boost U.S. energy independence, reduce pollution and appease America's European allies who are Kyoto crazy. Instead, McCain repeats the Kyoto mantra: "Everybody knows that climate change is going on."

Everybody? "Everybody who studies it knows it." But that's not true. Many scientists refute the notion that human-induced global warming presents certain dangers. His was a true believer's answer, not the response of someone who understands how complex the global-warming issue is.

McCain won't recognize that environmentalists acknowledge that even if implemented, Kyoto would not stop global warming. "Oh, of course it is. It's going to

put the brakes on it," McCain argued. Not according to the National Center for Atmospheric Research, which predicts that a fully implemented Kyoto would barely change the Earth's temperature.

I question McCain's claim that his Climate Stewardship Act — co-written with Sen. Joe Lieberman, D-Conn., and intended to reduce some industries' emissions to 2000 levels by 2010 — would only cost the average U.S. household \$20 annually. How can serious regulations cost so little? He responds that it "would be the first step."

Then — as if to prove that he's also willing to anger environmentalists — McCain supports using more nuclear power. His McCain-Feingold campaign-finance reform legislation, which President Bush signed into law, was supposed to limit the amount of money fat cats could pour into the political races and discourage dirty advertising. Yet few would consider 2004 a kinder, gentler (or cheaper) presidential race than past campaigns. Rich suits who once poured big money into the parties instead poured more money than ever into the parties and independent groups — also known as 527s, after their tax-code reference — that ran nastier TV spots than any credible campaign would dare air.

McCain doesn't see it that way. "It has been overwhelmingly successful," McCain said of the legislation. "The problem is the 527s, but that's not a problem with the law. That's the problem with the Federal Elections Commission."

The senator has been withering in his criticism of the FEC for refusing to enforce McCain-Feingold limits on 527s. Problem is, the courts have failed to make the FEC do what McCain wants it to do, and unless the courts force the FEC to change its ways, McCain-Feingold won't have changed anything — other than weakening the parties and strengthening extremist groups. "We'll beat 'em," McCain insisted.

OK, but what if you don't? "It's a

no-brainer, so we'll win in court." If the courts don't back McCain, will he still support a law that doesn't do what it's supposed to do? "What if pigs fly?" was his clipped response.

Speaking of pigs — the war hero is a political hero for his assaults on pork-barrel spending. In the town that balanced budgeting forgot, McCain is the rare official — worse, the rare Republican — who is outraged at the lard fests that have bloated the Bush deficit. He denounced and then voted against the \$388 billion catchall appropriations bill signed by President Bush.

McCain wouldn't dish Bush for signing the bill. In fact, McCain argued that Bush is concerned about "out-of-control spending" and that he is better on budgeting than Democrat John Kerry, who has a "very liberal record on spending." McCain is right about Bush, but the difference is: If John McCain were president, a GOP Congress wouldn't dare send him a bill that funnels \$1.8 million into berry research in Alaska or spends \$150,000 on a therapeutic horseback-riding program.

There's a principle involved here. That's right, a principle, smack dab in the District of Columbia.

So why do so many Democrats like John McCain? "I've had many people come up to me and say, 'I'm a Democrat from San Francisco, and I don't agree with you on many issues, but I'll support you because I think you're honest.'"

He is honest. Also, I think, in a world of officials who excel in keeping their heads down, right or wrong, John McCain is willing to stick his neck out for what he thinks is right.

E-mail Debra J. Saunders at dsaunders@sfchronicle.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.
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A copy shot of
of breast cancer

Yusho

By ALEKSANDR

Associated Press
KIEV, Ukraine — Viktor Yanukovich brated his inauguration Monday in Ukraine's presidential palace, thanking protesters who camped outside the frigid structure to secure his win.

Three exit polls showed a narrow lead for Yanukovich, who won 52.3 percent of the vote, with ballots from precincts counting.

While Yanukovich already declared himself winner, Yanukovich conceded to Shufrych, a Yanukovich ally.

U.S. t

By FREDERIC

Associated Press
WASHINGTON — Three decades end of the Vietnam War, the United States is increasing a remove unexploded ordnance that could kill people in war zones, especially in Laos where 2 million bombs were dropped during the war. The United States has spent \$1 billion in the last decade in an effort to remove the bombs.

Though the 30 years ago, from those bo

Comair h

By JOHN NOLAN

Associated Press
HEBRON, Ohio — Regional airlines will need several weeks to resume a full schedule of flights that were suspended over the weekend due to a computer failure, a Comair spokesman said.

A day after Comair's flight schedule was canceled, customers are being offered some relief. Some airlines are offering flights, about of its normal schedule.

"We anticipate will be able to a full schedule Wednesday," Miller, a spokesman for Delta-based Cincinnati-based Cincinnati In Airport. "The



San Jose Mercury News photo/Judith Calson

A copy shot of Etta Boyle's mother, Lelia Green, who died of breast cancer in 1990.

Case reflects influence ethnic differences have on genetic medicine

By APRIL LYNCH
Knight Ridder

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Something seemed odd with the families Dr. Nipavan Chiamvimonvat and Dr. Kathryn Glatter wanted to help.

The heart specialists at the University of California-Davis were curious about two Chinese-American mothers diagnosed with inherited Long QT syndrome, a dangerous heart ailment. Both had been labeled with a particular form of Long QT after taking a test that compared their genes to standards developed from a group of whites.

But their symptoms didn't match their genetic diagnoses. Chiamvimonvat and Glatter decided to start a new study that included genes from Asian-Americans.

Their work revealed that the original diagnosis was flawed — and had put the women and their families through years of the wrong medical care.

The women did have Long QT, but not the form originally suspected. One of the women had two small sons, who had both been screened previously with the wrong test. The elder boy, thought to share his mother's Long QT gene, had been taking heart medication for years. His younger brother, deemed healthy, wasn't being treated.

But the new test showed that the older son did not have the condition at all, and didn't need heart medication. Instead, the younger son had inherited his mother's Long QT gene — and should have been treated long ago. "It was chilling,"

Glatter said. "I cannot stress how important it is to have accurate matches when you are dealing with genetic issues. You need to make sure you are comparing apples to apples and oranges to oranges."

The UC-Davis finding reflects how broadly genetic medicine is influenced by ethnic differences.

That effect would seem to contradict other genetic findings. Scientists have repeatedly said there is no genetic basis for race — no distinguishing Asian, white or black gene.

Why, then, do groups show genetic differences?

The reason, scientists say, lies in the long periods of geographic isolation that mark much of human history.

Until relatively recent-

ly, groups of people lived far apart. That isolation encouraged certain genetic traits, not just external traits such as a particular skin color, but also internal traits, like cellular function. Now, genetic medicine is revealing just how much these internal traits can vary from group to group.

African-American women, for example, are known to suffer from more aggressive breast cancers. Doctors hope to reveal if these women have unique gene features.

"I really want to compare Africans, African-Americans and mixed-race women and see if there is a genetic profile," said Dr. Denise Johnson, a breast cancer specialist at Stanford University Medical Center. "We didn't have the tools before, but now we do."

Yushchenko claims decisive win in Ukraine's presidential election

By ALEKSANDAR VASOVIC
Associated Press Writer

KIEV, Ukraine — Opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko celebrated his insurmountable lead Monday in the re-run of Ukraine's presidential election, thanking protesters who spent weeks camped out in the capital's frigid streets for helping secure his win and the nation's freedom.

Three exit polls gave him a 15 to 20 percentage point lead over pro-Russian Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich. The official vote count gave the Western-leaning Yushchenko a 52.3 percent to 43.9 percent lead with ballots from 98.5 percent of precincts counted in Sunday's voting.

While Yushchenko had already declared himself the winner, Yanukovich had not conceded defeat. Nestor Shufrych, a lawmaker and Yanukovich ally, told reporters

the Yanukovich campaign would appeal the results.

"Now, today, the Ukrainian people have won. I congratulate you," Yushchenko told a jubilant crowd in Kiev's Independence Square, the center of massive protests following the Nov. 21 presidential runoff that was annulled after fraud allegations.

"We have been independent for 14 years but we were not free," Yushchenko said. "Now we can say this is a thing of the past. Now we are facing an independent and free Ukraine."

Results were trickling in slowly from two regions in pro-Yanukovich territory in eastern Ukraine. Central Election Commission chairman Yaroslav Davydovych urged election workers to do their jobs. "Put political issues aside. The state is waiting for results," he said.

Georgian President Mikhail

Saakashvili, whose own accession to power on a wave of peaceful protest in November 2003 inspired Ukraine's opposition, congratulated Yushchenko in a Ukrainian-language message delivered over Ukrainian television. Saakashvili, who attended law school in then-Soviet Ukraine, apparently is first foreign leader to publicly recognize Yushchenko's victory.

Poland's former President Lech Walesa told the Polish news agency PAP that Yushchenko's victory meant "Ukraine on its road to freedom and democracy made a small move towards Europe."

International observers praised the vote as calm and orderly.

Yushchenko was not taking chances. He called his supporters back out onto the square Monday afternoon to defend the election victory, if necessary,

and asked for their help in what he called the main task facing the nation: forming a trustworthy government.

Ukrainians heading to work Monday stopped at Independence Square to see the latest results on a television monitor, cheering and chanting "Yu-shchen-ko! Yu-shchen-ko!" Their cheers were punctuated by blasts from car horns.

Some 12,000 foreign observers watched Sunday's unprecedented third-round vote to help prevent a repeat of the apparent widespread fraud on Nov. 21 that sparked massive protests after Yanukovich was declared winner.

Both campaigns complained of violations. Yanukovich's headquarters filed numerous complaints.

But Mykola Melnyk, a member of the Central Election Commission, insisted: "This repeat vote was fair and honest,

especially in comparison with the second round."

Monitors said they'd seen far fewer problems this round, in which 77.2 percent of registered voters turned out.

"This is another country," said Stefan Mironjuk, a German election monitor observing the vote in the northern Sumy region. "The atmosphere of intimidation and fear during the first and second rounds was absent. ... It was very, very calm."

Sure of victory, Yushchenko backers appeared to be taking a rest after weeks camped out in the square. About 5,000 had gathered in the square to hear his victory speech, setting off fireworks in celebration.

"Today we began to live! Today, we rose off our knees and showed ourselves and the world that our future can't be dictated to us. We will dictate it," said Olga Drik, 21.

U.S. to increase funding to remove unexploded bombs in Laos

By FREDERIC FROMMER
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Three decades after the end of the Vietnam War, the United States is increasing aid to help remove unexploded ordnance that continues to kill people in the former war zone, especially in Laos where 2 million tons of bombs were dropped. During the war, the United States bombed Laos relentlessly for a decade in an effort to cut off North Vietnamese supply lines.

Though the war ended 30 years ago, the carnage from those bombings con-

tinues. Nearly a third of the bombs failed to explode, lying in wait as "de facto anti-personnel mines," according to a Human Rights Watch report. The bombs have killed roughly 6,000 Laotians since the end of fighting.

"Every time I go to Laos I meet fresh bomb victims who have lost an eye or a leg or two," said Jim Harris, a retired Wisconsin school principal who helps educate people about the experience of Laotian refugees in his state.

U.S. pilots dropped 2 million tons of bombs on Laos from 1964-1973, dou-

ble the amount dropped on Germany in World War II.

The United States has agreed to nearly double the amount of aid it provides to help remove those bombs, known as unexploded ordnance, or UXO. Congress approved \$2.5 million for bomb removal in Laos next year, up from \$1.4 million, as part of a move to normalize trade relations with the impoverished Southeast Asian country.

But the improvement in trade relations and even the increased funding for bomb removal were opposed by some critics who said Laos continues

to persecute its Hmong minority that fought alongside the CIA during the Vietnam War.

"Why should the U.S. taxpayer pay to remove land mines and unexploded ordnance from the Vietnam War, when the Lao government and military are involved in military operations against the Hmong people?" asked Philip Smith, the Washington director of Lao Veterans of America.

But Rep. Betty McCollum, D-Minn., said

the United States "has a moral obligation to partner with the people of Laos to help eliminate the ordnance and put the land back into productive use for this impoverished nation."

Many of the Hmong people who fled Laos settled in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

While the Laotian government is in charge of bomb removal, it relies on help from other countries and outside groups to help pay for it. The

Laotian bomb removal agency, UXO Lao, hit a crisis point a couple of years ago.

"Money wasn't coming in sufficient numbers, and UXO Lao had to let go of half of its employees," said Douglas Hartwick, the U.S. ambassador to Laos from 2001 until last July. "So there was a big push on the part of donors, and the Lao government to put together a long-term coherent strategy, to clean up the unexploded bombs."

Comair hopes to be fully operational by Wednesday

By JOHN NOLAN
Associated Press Writer

HEBRON, Ky. — Regional airline Comair will need several days to resume a full schedule of flights that were grounded over the busy holiday weekend due to a computer failure, a company official said.

A day after all 1,100 of Comair's flights were canceled, customers frustrated from days of delays and cancellations got some relief Sunday when the airline resumed 172 flights, about 15 percent of its normal schedule.

"We anticipate Comair will be able to operate on a full schedule by Wednesday," said Nick Miller, a spokesman for the Delta subsidiary based at Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport. "That is our

goal." About 100 people stood in line Sunday at the ticket counter shared by Comair and Delta, waiting to be helped by two dozen agents. Nearby in the terminal were huge piles of lost luggage.

Comair wasn't the only airline that experienced problems during the holiday travel rush. US Airways started chipping away Sunday at a mountain of backed-up luggage, part of what its chief executive called an "oper-

ational meltdown." Hundreds of US Airways flights were canceled from Friday to Sunday, the result of severe weather Thursday and large numbers of baggage handlers, ramp workers and flight attendants calling in sick.

US Airways was operating at near-normal levels by Sunday, when it had canceled 43 of about 1,200 flights systemwide. That was down from 143 scratched flights on Saturday.

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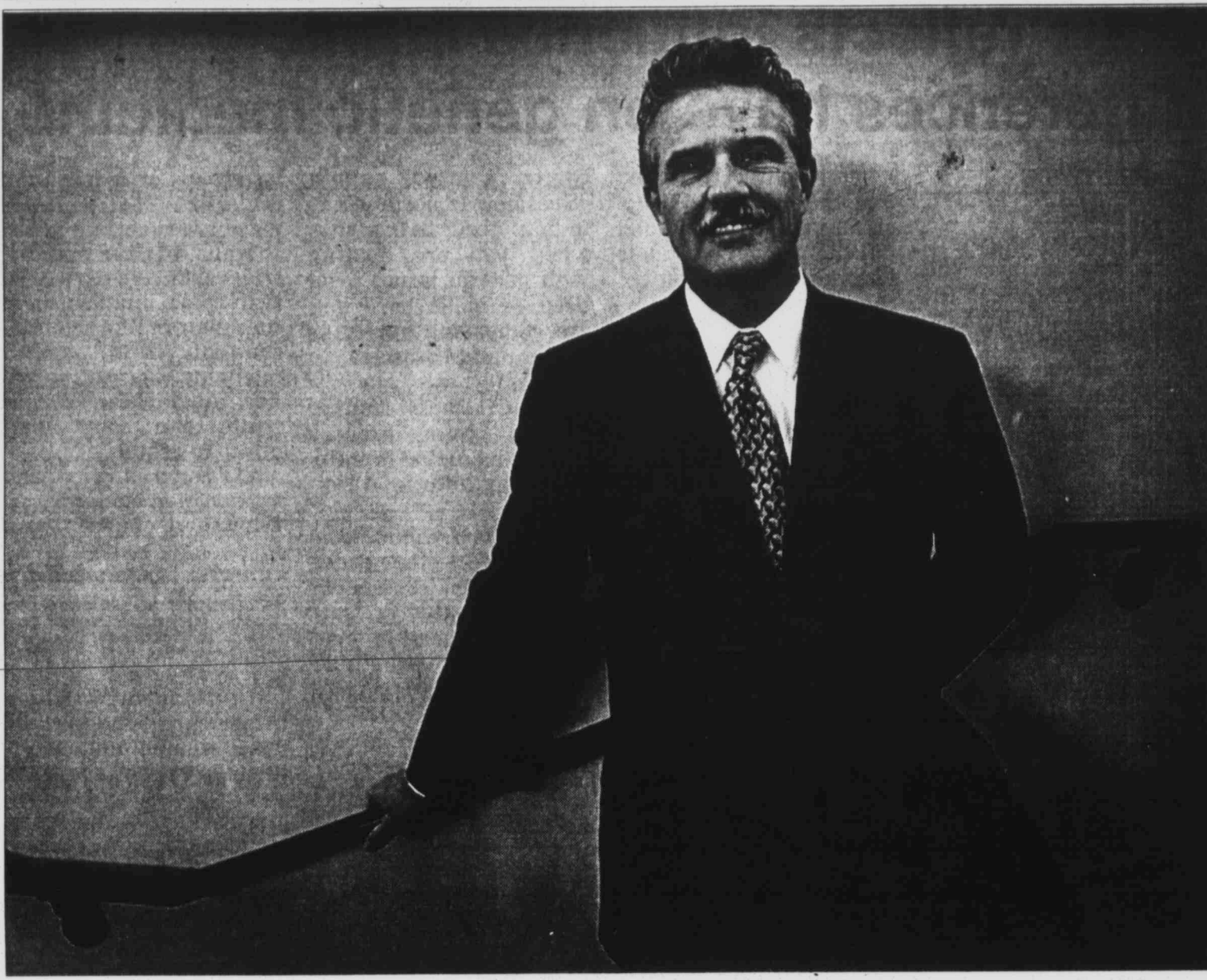
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KRT Photo/Rick E. Martin, San Jose Mercury News
Jeff McFadden is CEO and Chairman of Claria, a Redwood City, Calif., company that makes "adware," or programs that are loaded to PCs initially as part of free services such as Kazaa filesharing or a new screen saver.

Claria at center of debate on ethics in advertising

By Dan Lee

Knight Ridder Newspapers
SAN JOSE, Calif. — Claria is a company some just love to hate.

The Redwood City, Calif., software maker is the king of "adware," the leader in an industry increasingly seen as a public nuisance on the Internet.

Claria has a simple goal: get you to download its software that serves up pop-ups and other Internet ads. Its software ends up on people's computers when they download free programs. Claria's adware tracks the computer user's Web surfing and then serves up targeted ads.

Critics call Claria's methods confusing and invasive.

"Claria presents its notice and consent...in such a manner that most users mindlessly press 'accept' without understanding that what they're accepting is extra pop-ups," said Ben Edelman, a Harvard graduate student who is a noted adware and Claria critic.

But the company says it is legitimately offering targeted advertising to Internet users who have granted permission. "These consumers are interacting with our ads. They're voting with their mouses, their clicks and their wallets," said Scott Eagle, Claria's chief marketing officer.

No matter what, Claria finds itself at the center of a debate over the evolving rules and ethics of Internet advertising.

Its tactics have been pushed into the limelight with the emergence of spyware, a loose term for unsolicited, malicious software that can change computer settings or steal personal information. Claria says its adware is different from spyware because the company gets users' consent and its technology is used strictly for advertising and marketing.

Claria, which last year changed its name from Gator, faces challenges from many sides, including legislative efforts to curb unwanted software programs, new technology that wipes out adware and spyware, pressure from Internet rights advocates and lawsuits from businesses that claim Claria's practices are unfair.

In one recent example, America Online last month began rolling out a "Spyzapper" feature that will allow most of its 23 million customers to remove common spyware and adware programs including Claria's. AOL said Claria's programs were causing "connectivity problems" for users.

The company also has faced lawsuits from retailers, banks and media companies who objected to its advertisements being displayed while surfers were viewing their Web sites. In August, Claria settled with Wells Fargo and Quicken Loans. The terms were not disclosed.

Internet users end up with Claria's adware on their computers by agreeing to download free software that's supported by advertising. The most common way is when people sign up for free access to Kazaa, the popular file-sharing network, which has a partnership agreement with Claria.

The company also offers its own freebie programs - including screen savers and software that sets a computer's clock - in exchange for its adware. "They are cheap digital trinkets," said Wayne Porter, co-founder of consumer information site SpywareGuide.com.

Claria's ads can appear at any time. For example, a Web surfer might get a pop-up ad for a DVD player while browsing the site of a rival electronics company.

Claria says it explicitly tells consumers they will be served ads in exchange for free software. Jeff

McFadden, Claria president and chief executive, said the company has gone "way overboard" to label its ads as coming from Claria's GAIN-advertising network and to provide instructions on how consumers can remove its adware. "We listen pretty carefully to what people are saying to us," he said.

But critics say more disclosure is needed. They note that Claria's ads can show up any time users are online, not just when they are on the free programs they received in exchange for agreeing to take Claria's ads.

"It seems that Claria over time has not done a good job of explaining what software is running and why," said Ari Schwartz, associate director of the Center for Democracy and Technology, an Internet rights group.

Despite working to improve its disclosures and distance itself from less savory players in the adware industry, Claria is being tainted by the growing overall consumer disdain for unsolicited software downloads.

"It almost doesn't matter how they operate," said Jim Nail, marketing analyst with Forrester Research. "That idea that there is some piece of foreign software someone puts on your computer, all that gets lumped into this one category of adware if you're polite and spyware if you're not."

Nonetheless, Claria seems to be sitting on a gold mine. The company, which has about 225 employees, has shown impressive growth since its founding in 1998. It earned \$34.8 million on \$90.5 million in sales in 2003 - a hefty 39 percent profit margin. The results were up from a \$91,000 profit on sales of \$40.1 million in 2002, according to regulatory filings.

The company filed to go public this year but withdrew those plans in

August, citing market conditions.

It has an impressive roster of backers. Investors include Silicon Valley heavyweights U.S. Venture Partners of Menlo Park, Calif., and Sun Microsystems co-founder Andy Bechtolsheim.

Last year, Claria boasted 425 advertising customers, up from about 350 in 2002, including Orbitz, FTD.com, Motorola and Sprint. The company says its advertising software runs on about 40 million computers.

Claria said its software tracks users anonymously, and the company does not collect personal information such as last names, e-mail addresses or computer passwords.

Claria said it sometimes shares "aggregated" Web-surfing information about its users with advertisers - such as telling a retailer it has 50,000 subscribers who buy books.

Claria started out by offering its "Gator eWallet," software that stores and fills in passwords and other information in Web forms.

The company traces its roots back to a 1995 visit to the supermarket by McFadden, a company founder who began his career as a software developer for General Motors. He observed a clerk scan in bar codes on groceries, which triggered a printer to spit out coupons based on products purchased - issuing a coupon for Pampers to someone who had just bought Huggies diapers, for instance.

Why not bring that custom marketing to the Internet, he thought.

He envisioned watching Web page surfing patterns instead of bar codes to "notice that someone's in the market for a mortgage, or a DVD player or a new car," he said. "We're trying to deliver the advertisements at the time they're going to be most relevant to the consumer."

NEWS BRIEFS

Israel releases 159 Palestinian prisoners as gesture to new Palestinian leadership

BEITUNIA CHECKPOINT, West Bank (AP) — Israel released 159 Palestinian prisoners Monday as a gesture to the new Palestinian leadership.

Interim Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, the frontrunner in Jan. 9 presidential elections, welcomed the release, but said Israel must free those sentenced to lengthy terms. Some 7,000 Palestinians are held by Israel on security-related charges, and Abbas is under intense pressure at home to win their freedom.

In the West Bank, Israeli troops shot and killed a Palestinian fugitive.

Dozens of prisoners arrived Monday morning at dropoff points in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, some waving Palestinian flags and flashing victory signs.

The prisoner release was part of a swap with Egypt. On Dec. 5, Egypt released Azzam Azzam, an Israeli who served eight years in an Egyptian jail on charges he was a spy. In exchange, Israel released six Egyptian students accused of planning attacks on Israel and agreed to release Palestinian prisoners.

Russia, China to hold unprecedented joint military maneuvers next year

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia and China will hold unprecedented joint military maneuvers on Chinese territory next year involving both nations' air forces and navies, Russia's defense minister on Monday.

Sergei Ivanov, speaking at a Cabinet session chaired by President Vladimir Putin, said that the exercise would involve submarines and possibly strategic bombers, the Interfax and ITAR-Tass news agencies reported.

"For the first time in history, we have agreed to hold quite a large military exercise together with China on Chinese territory in the second half of the year," Ivanov said, according to ITAR-Tass.

"The Russian side will not bring big numbers of servicemen, but mostly state-of-the-art weapons — navy, air, long-range aviation, submarines to practice interaction with China in different forms of military maneuvers," he reported to Putin.

Putin then asked whether Russian strategic bombers would take part in the exercise. "It's not excluded," Ivanov answered.

Intelligence agencies cope with shortage of analysts

WASHINGTON (AP) — Counterterrorism agencies are shopping for talent at job fairs, dangling generous scholarships and luring staff from each other in a race to overcome a shortage of analysts that may only get worse in the new intelligence overhaul.

The problem existed even before Congress and the White House approved an intelligence restructuring this month that creates positions for people whose skills already are in high demand.

There is no consensus across the nation's 15 intelligence agencies on where staffing needs are the most acute. But few dispute that many more analysts are needed, particularly in the departments and agencies created since Sept. 11, 2001. The nearly two-year-old Homeland Security Department is a prime example.

To find them, Homeland Security and other agencies are heading to job fairs, often looking near military bases where civil service is part of the culture and people may have security clearances. They're also trying to snag people from the private sector.

"If you had a hundred, we'd take them," Pat Hughes, the Homeland Security Department's top intelligence official, said earlier this year.

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IN BRIEF

NFL defensive great Reggie White dies at age of 43

CORNELIUS, N.C. (AP) — Reggie White earned Brett Favre's respect on and off the field.

"He may have been best player I've ever seen and certainly was the best I've ever played with or against," the Green Bay quarterback said after White's death Sunday.

"Off the field, he did so much for so many people. He really reached a lot of people. ... He was a great friend on and off the field. We'll all miss him."

The fearsome Philadelphia and Green Bay defensive end was 43.

"It just seems so odd, so surreal," said former Packers teammate Eugene Robinson, now a commentator for Carolina, where White spent his final season. "I'm still like, 'I don't believe it.' When I saw it flash on the television — 1961 to 2004 — I was just like, 'I'm not going to try to fight back any more tears. I'm just going to cry.'"

The cause of death was not immediately known, however White had a respiratory ailment for several years that affected his sleep, according to Keith Johnson, a pastor serving as family spokesman. An autopsy was scheduled.

A two-time NFL Defensive Player of the Year and ordained minister who was known as the "Minister of Defense," White played 15 seasons with Philadelphia, Green Bay and Carolina. He retired after the 2000 season as the NFL's career sacks leader with 198.

Fresno State is delighted to face Virginia in MPC

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Virginia offers the perfect matchup for Fresno State coach Pat Hill: a Top 25 opponent and another chance to knock off a team from a BCS conference.

At least this time Fresno State faces the 18th-ranked Cavaliers of the Atlantic Coast Conference on a neutral field Monday in the MPC Computers Bowl. Usually, the Bulldogs play these games in the other team's stadium.

But if anyone thinks Fresno State (8-3) from the Western Athletic Conference has nothing to lose, think again.

"We've got plenty to lose," Hill insisted. "When we played Washington in the opener, our fans wouldn't have accepted a loss. The expectation at Fresno State is to win, and a win over Virginia would salvage our season at 9-3."

Boise isn't your typical bowl trip.

The weather is frosty, though this year it's rather warm with a forecast of 41 degrees and partly cloudy skies.

Yep, there's that eye-popping blue field, which must startle some TV viewers. Nothing's wrong with your television — the Smurf Turf matches the colors of host school Boise State.

Texas' Young a nightmare for Wolverines

By JIM VERTUNO
AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES — With Texas trailing late against Kansas and needing 18 yards on fourth down to keep a rally alive, quarterback Vince Young made something happen.

Instead of hanging in the pocket to make the big throw, Young took off running. Twenty-two yards later, he had a first down, a key play in comeback that ended with his touchdown pass to Tony Jeffery with 11 seconds left in the Longhorns' 27-23 win.

Without Young's ability to improvise and stay calm under pressure, No. 6 Texas (10-1) wouldn't be waiting to play No. 13 Michigan (9-2) in the Rose Bowl on Jan. 1.

"One of the great things about Vince Young is that he can beat

you both ways," Texas coach Mack Brown.

That's also why he's such a nightmare for a Michigan defense that has been exposed this season as weak against mobile quarterbacks.

"What I try to do is keep (defenses) on edge knowing I'm going to run or pass," Young said. "I'm going to always go out there trying to be a defense's worst nightmare."

All of which leads to some fretful nights for Michigan coaches and players trying to figure out how to stop him. Defensive pressure up front sometimes isn't enough.

"He's made a lot of big plays when things go wrong in the pocket," said Michigan coach Lloyd Carr.

The Wolverines looked flat-footed in their last outing, a 37-21

loss to Ohio State when Buckeyes quarterback Troy Smith ran and passed at will against a defense that boasts two All-Americans in defensive backs Marlin Jackson and Ernest Shazor. Smith ran for 145 yards and passed for 241 yards and two TDs.

Now comes Young, who at 6-foot-5, 220 pounds is a strong but fluid runner who is fast enough to outrun defenders and big enough to break tackles.

"He makes plays," Michigan linebacker Roy Manning said. "He has a great arm and can throw it over your head, throw it down the field while he's running. He's just an exceptional athlete."

Young has run for 10 touchdowns while passing for 11 more scores. Longhorns tackle Justin Blalock said Young's big-play

ability more than once left his teammates laughing at defenders he left flailing hopelessly behind.

"There's been a couple of times guys have looked just silly," Blalock said. "That's bound to happen just about every game."

It wasn't all good all season. Young played his two worst games of the season in consecutive weeks against Oklahoma and Missouri.

In a 12-0 loss to the Sooners, he committed a key fumble deep in Oklahoma territory in the first half. The next week, he was benched in the second half after throwing two early interceptions in a 28-20 win over Missouri.

Never rattled, Young shook off those two games and came back with one of his best of the season, running for four touchdowns and passing for another in a 51-21 win at Texas Tech.

HERO IN THE FINAL MOMENTS

Testaverde throws late TD for win

By STEPHEN HAWKINS
AP Sports Writer

IRVING — Sure, Vinny Testaverde heard the constant boos and chants from Dallas fans who wanted to see the Cowboys try another quarterback.

They were cheering at the end, even though they never got their wish.

With an unexpected last chance — with 85 seconds and no timeouts — Testaverde led the Cowboys on a 75-yard drive. He hit Patrick Crayton with a 39-yard touchdown pass with 30 seconds left Sunday for a 13-10 win over the Washington Redskins.

"He blocks most of that stuff out," said coach Bill Parcells, who has stood steadfast by his 41-year-old quarterback. "He'll remember that pass for a quite a while."

Testaverde blocked out not only the boos, but the poor play that preceded the final drive.

After Washington (5-10) took the lead on Patrick Ramsey's 5-yard TD pass to Robert Royal with 6:44 left, the Cowboys had three other chances before the last drive.

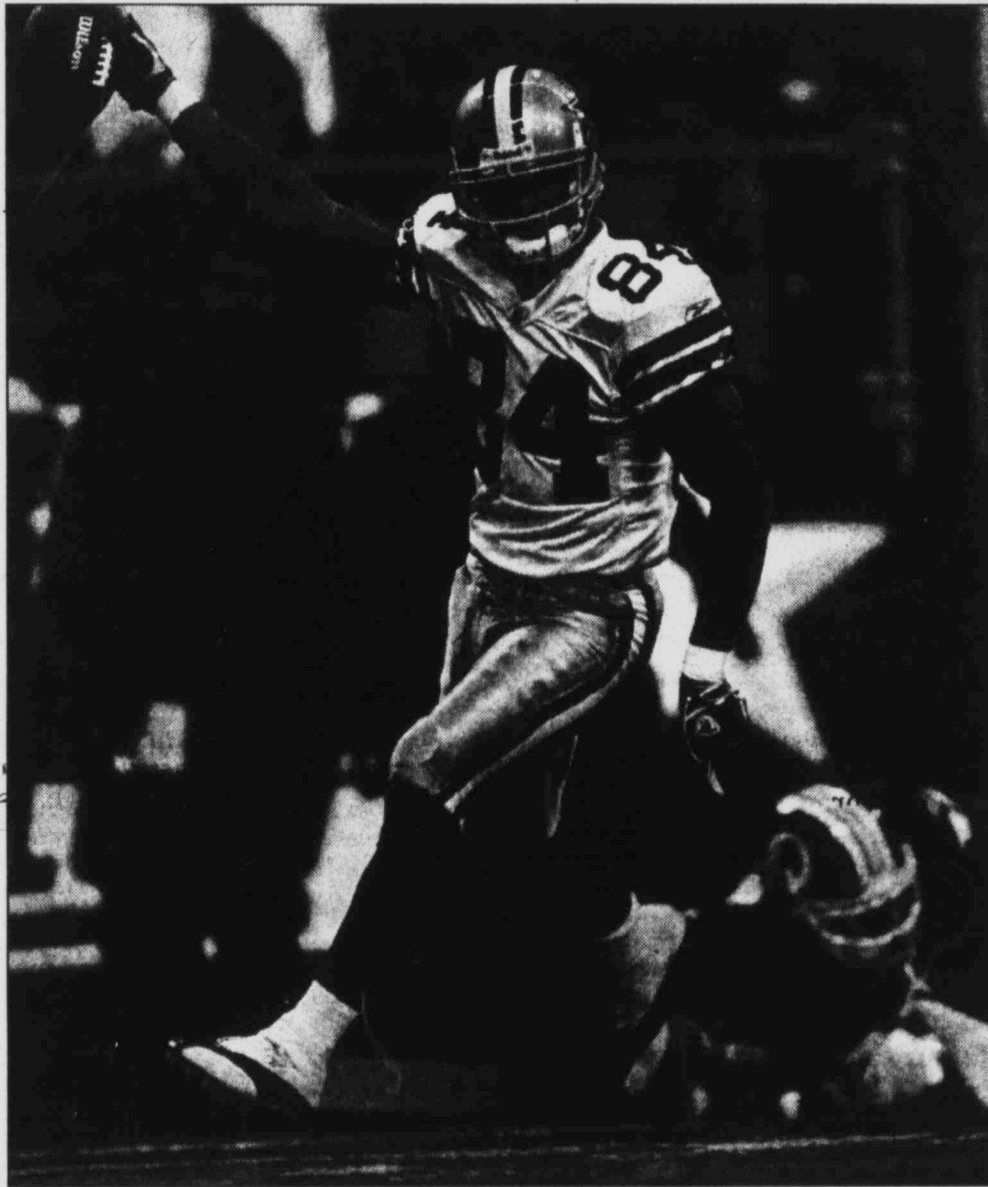
There were a pair of three-and-outs when Testaverde was sacked three times, scrambled for two 3-yard runs and had an incomplete. The Cowboys (6-9) then picked up 9 yards to the 24 after Antonio Brown fumbled a punt, but a fourth-down screen to Julius Jones got nothing.

The boos were the loudest when Testaverde walked off the field, seemingly for the last time.

"You hear everything. My ears work," Testaverde said. "We all want to be cheered, we don't want to be booed. The only thing I can control is to go out and try to play the next play, not worry about the result of the last play."

Testaverde got another chance only after Ramsey, the young Washington quarterback coach Joe Gibbs has already tabbed as his starter for next season, couldn't get a first down and run out the clock.

The Redskins punted and Testaverde added to the drama



KRT photo/Ron T. Ennis/Fort Worth Star-Telegram
Patrick Crayton beats safety Sean Taylor for the game-winning touchdown in the fourth quarter as the Dallas Cowboys defeated the Washington Redskins 13-10 at Texas Stadium.

with three straight incompletions — even with Washington backing off the pressure. But he converted fourth down with a 15-yarder to Crayton and later hit him in stride along the sideline for the rookie's first TD.

"I certainly didn't want to go after him and have someone open scot-free," Gibbs said. "We tried to play it smart, but got caught with one down the sideline."

The Redskins lost for the 14th time in 15 games against the Cowboys after Jeff Chandler's 57-yard field goal try fell short on the final play. They haven't won at Texas Stadium since 1995.

"It is an understatement to say this is a tough way to lose," said Ramsey, who finished 19-of-29 for 158 yards with two interceptions.

Ramsey drove the Redskins inside the Dallas 11 the first two drives, but only got a field goal. They didn't cross midfield again

until the TD drive in the fourth quarter.

Gibbs wraps up his first season back on the sideline at home against playoff-seeking Minnesota. He's already got more losses than in any other season.

Dallas ended a two-game losing streak, even after managing just two field goals with two turnovers inside the 5 (Testaverde's interception and Jones' fumble) the first three quarters. But the Cowboys were eliminated from the playoffs.

Parcells, who had prepared second-year backup Tony Romo for the possibility of playing Sunday, hasn't said what his quarterback plan is for the season finale.

Testaverde, who was 23-of-39 for 234 yards, plans to prepare like he'll play the entire game — like he has in all but two games. Rookie Drew Henson finished one game and played the first half Thanksgiving Day.

Texans hurt Jags' playoff hopes, 21-0

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (AP) — The Houston Texans damaged Jacksonville's postseason hopes with a 21-0 victory Sunday in the team's first-ever shutout.

Domanick Davis ran for a career-high 150 yards and a touchdown, surpassing the total 126 yards managed by Jacksonville without running back Fred Taylor, the Jaguars' top offensive weapon, who missed the game with a sprained left knee.

"I just tried to come out here and do my thing today. Plus, the offensive line did a great job, there was no way I could have done it without them," Davis said.

The Texans moved the ball with ease. They finished with 333 yards,

much of it thanks to Davis. His previous career high was 129 yards, set last season against the New York Jets and tied last month against Tennessee. He also caught five passes for 39 yards.

It was the most yards rushing gained by one player against the Jags since Chicago's Anthony Thomas had 160 in the 2001 season finale.

The Jags haven't been blanked since a 44-0 drubbing at Detroit on Dec. 17, 1995, but this one could be far more costly than that loss to the Lions in Jacksonville's inaugural season.

Because Baltimore lost at Pittsburgh, the Jaguars (8-7) could

have taken control of the final AFC wild-card spot with a victory against Houston (7-8). Instead, they will need to win next week at Oakland and have the Ravens, Denver and maybe even Buffalo lose to return to the postseason for the first time since 1999.

"It felt good to win this game against them. They were talking playoffs and kind of overlooking us," wide receiver Jabar Gaffney said. "They still had two games left to play and we kind of took that as a little chip on our shoulder."

The Texans scored on the opening possession, a 65-yard drive highlighted by a perfect 19-yard pass from David Carr to Gaffney.

Manning breaks Marino's TD mark

By MICHAEL MAROT
AP Sports Writer

INDIANAPOLIS — Peyton Manning was too busy trying to beat the San Diego Chargers to celebrate his record-breaking touchdown pass.

The Indianapolis star broke Dan Marino's single-season record with 56 seconds left in regulation, hitting Brandon Stokley on a 21-yard post pattern, but still had a lot of work to do in the Colts' 34-31 overtime victory Sunday.

Edgerrin James ran for the tying 2-point conversion on a play Manning called at the line, and the Colts won on Mike Vanderjagt's 30-yard field goal on the first possession of overtime.

It was only then that Manning, finally, let go by pumping his fist in the air, giving high-fives to teammates and hugging six-time Pro Bowl receiver Marvin Harrison.

"At the time I threw it, there wasn't a lot of emotion for me, because if we don't get the 2-point conversion, this is a down locker room right now," Manning said. "The fact that it happened, we won the game. ... It sure made for an exciting day."

For three weeks, Manning downplayed the significance of Marino's record, football's equivalent of baseball's home-run mark, saying all he wanted to do was win.

In the closing minutes Sunday, Manning delivered.

Indianapolis (12-3) scored on its final two possessions to win its eighth straight and wrap up the No. 3 seed in the AFC playoffs.

"The way it happened on that drive, I think Johnny Unitas would have been proud," Manning said.

The AFC West champion Chargers (11-4) tried to prevent the high-scoring Colts from torching their poor pass defense. They blitzed, used extra defensive backs and changed their looks to confuse Manning.

It worked effectively for three quarters.

Manning, who had been sacked just nine times in the first 14 games, went down four times against the Chargers. He fumbled twice, threw an interception and appeared to be pressing as he overthrew receivers, mistimed throws and ran out of trouble.

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Tomorrow's Horoscope

BY HOLIDAY MATHIS

The full moon in Cancer yesterday likely brought up family and domestic issues that will not be resolved for weeks. New information must be mull'd over, sorted through and carefully processed. It's important not to rush ahead with judgment or take action that cannot be easily undone. Reserve the right to change your mind later!



HOLIDAY MATHIS

ARIES (March 21-April 19). Relationships have seasons. Though it may be winter outside, it's definitely spring in a special relationship. So make sure there's enough rain, in the form of honesty, and sunshine, in the form of fun, to grow this bond.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). You're trying to make a particularly challenging situation work. Others have done it before you -- use the library or go online to find out how they did it. Knowing when to be silent will put you in an excellent position tonight.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). Your way of apportioning responsibility is not what the others had in mind. You'll be forced to re-examine your choice. Is it really fair or just convenient? Probably, it's a little of both. Sometimes, you have to say, "My bad."

CANCER (June 22-July 22). The infantile behavior of a full-grown person is appalling! It would be easy to write this person off as not worth the time, but the fact is, there's something valuable at stake. Find compassion, and communicate.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). It's the kind of day that requires stable blood sugar to get through -- in other words, make sure

you're eating often enough to keep your energy high! Others are depending on you to come through for the whole group.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). Excellent use is made of your talent for distinguishing the finer points of an argument or deal. For one thing, the specifics make or break a business situation. Also, a vocabulary choice could win a heart.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). Yes, you're widely accomplished, but be careful of the jack-of-all-trades (master-of-none) syndrome! You're better off homing in on what you do the best and delegating the rest to those who'd love to have the work.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). You're not acting your age -- depending on the task, you assign a much more mature version of yourself or send a childish part of you to do the job. Either way, there's wisdom in your choice.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). You're in a shopping mood -- for a new job, perhaps, or a new love. "Trying on" the merchandise in your mind is half the fun. The sexiest thing about you now is your philosophy. Share it with potential partners.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). You're not willing to spend major time on minor priorities -- smart thinking. Now, all you have to do is teach certain loved ones to follow your lead on this, and everyone can work in the same direction.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). Sensational ideas float like dandelion seeds on the wind of your mind. There's no need to force things, as some will plant themselves naturally in the exact right place. Loved ones are in awe of your process!

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). As usual, the person who can help you the most is in close proximity. The problem is, you don't want to ask -- there's

too much "gunk" in the way of this relationship. Now is the perfect day to clear the path of communication.

ASTROLOGICAL QUESTIONS: A Virgo writes: "My problem is that I've been stuttering a lot lately, and my doctor calls it social anxiety. It's starting to affect my social life. Can you please give me some advice on how to handle it without taking medicine?"

Stuttering affects 1 percent of adults worldwide and 4 percent of children. In astrology, stuttering falls under the domain of Mercury, the planet of communication, which happens to be Virgo's ruling planet. I think you can lick this problem fast without drugs and without speech therapy, and I admire you for being so willing. Actually, it's a lucky problem to have because it's a valuable opportunity for you to do some personal development and get to know yourself on a level that a lot of people will never reach because they never think they have a good enough reason. Start by examining your negative belief system (that you are being judged, that you must be perfect, that life is a performance and so on), and replace those negative beliefs with some positive ones (I am as good as anyone else, my feelings deserve to be heard and so on). There are many books and Web sites that will help you on this journey. I believe in you!

If you would like to write to Holiday Mathis, please go to www.creators.com and click on "Write the Author" on the Holiday Mathis page, or you may send her a postcard in the mail. To find out more about Holiday Mathis and read her past columns, visit the Creators Syndicate Web page at www.creators.com.

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Annie's Mailbox

Dear Annie: I've been married to "Susan" for over 20 years, and we have two teenage children. Our marriage started out like most -- a lot of good times, along with some difficulties, but nothing we couldn't work out. My job involves working shifts with a varied schedule, and 12 years ago, Susan got a full-time job with an ambulance service and also works odd shifts.



**KATHY MITCHELL
MARCY SUGAR**

Nine years ago, at the age of 39, my wife needed a full hysterectomy. After this, our very good sex life slowly started to go downhill. At first, I tried to be understanding, but the situation didn't improve. My wife insisted there was no problem -- but it certainly was a problem for me. I asked her to seek counseling, but she had no interest. I saw a counselor on my own, but was told it wouldn't be much use without my wife's participation.

I thought we could work through our problems, but now Susan says if I need sex, I should go out and get it, but I should never expect to touch her again. She has asked for a separation.

I've suggested to Susan that her medications may need adjusting, but she insists she's just fine. So what I'm asking is, how can I convince her that we both need to talk to someone? -- Left Out in the Cold

Dear Left Out: While we recognize that some women lose interest in sex after menopause (or a

hysterectomy), we do not understand why a loving wife would not make any effort to work on something that so severely damages her marriage.

Ask your wife once more to go with you for counseling in the hope that you can work on this separation. Do not mention sex. If Susan refuses, please go back to your counselor and ask for help on the best way to cope with this latest development.

Dear Annie: Several weeks ago, a man I dearly loved died. We had known each other four short years. Although we planned to marry, and even bought the rings, we never made it legal. In our hearts we already were married. We thought we had plenty of time for a wedding.

I miss him with everything in my soul. I guess what I'm trying to say is, if you find the one you love, marry him when he asks, and don't keep putting it off. You never know when he will leave you. -- Sad and Lonely

Dear Sad and Lonely: Life is short, and we should not take anything for granted. Thank you for reminding us to seize the moment and not let it pass by. Our condolences.

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

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DENNIS THE MENACE



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This Date In History

By the Associated Press

Today is Monday, Dec. 27, the 362nd day of 2004. There are four days left in the year. Today's Highlight in History: On Dec. 27, 1979, Soviet forces seized control of Afghanistan. President Hafizullah Amin, who was overthrown and executed, was replaced by Babrak Karmal. On this date: In 1822, scientist Louis Pasteur was born in Dole, France. In 1831, naturalist Charles Darwin set out on a voyage to the Pacific aboard the HMS "Beagle." (Darwin's discoveries during the trip helped to form the basis of his theories on evolution.) In 1900, militant prohibitionist Carry A. Nation carried out her first public

smashing of a bar, at the Carey Hotel in Wichita, Kan. In 1904, 100 years ago, James Barrie's play "Peter Pan: The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up" opened at the Duke of York's Theater in London. In 1927, the musical play "Show Boat," with music by Jerome Kern and libretto by Oscar Hammerstein II, opened at the Ziegfeld Theater in New York. In 1932, Radio City Music Hall opened in New York. In 1945, 28 nations signed an agreement creating the World Bank. In 1947, the children's television program "Howdy Doody" made its debut on NBC. In 1968, Apollo 8 and its three astronauts made a safe, nighttime splashdown in the Pacific. In 1985, Palestinian guerrillas opened fire inside the Rome and Vienna airports; a total of 20 people were killed, including five of the attackers, who were slain by police and security personnel.

Today's Birthdays: Former U.S. Sen. James A. McClure, R-Idaho, is 80. Rockabilly musician Scotty Moore is 73. Actor John Pan: The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up" opened at the Duke of York's Theater in London. In 1927, the musical play "Show Boat," with music by Jerome Kern and libretto by Oscar Hammerstein II, opened at the Ziegfeld Theater in New York. In 1932, Radio City Music Hall opened in New York. In 1945, 28 nations signed an agreement creating the World Bank. In 1947, the children's television program "Howdy Doody" made its debut on NBC. In 1968, Apollo 8 and its three astronauts made a safe, nighttime splashdown in the Pacific. In 1985, Palestinian guerrillas opened fire inside the Rome and Vienna airports; a total of 20 people were killed, including five of the attackers, who were slain by police and security personnel.

Answer to previous puzzle: SPACEDOUT, BARON, IRRADIATE, ELEGY, CONVICTED, FLARE, SWEETIE, DROPLET, INS, YOUR, QUAHOG, ABALONES, TRAIN, SUERS, ORT, ISNT, SAJAK, EURO, PAD, INCUR, TYSON, SEESTARS, CHEERY, PEKE, BEE, CAROMED, ERASERS, ATARI, COGITATES, PEREZ, ONESEATER, TEASE, WATERBEDS

Newsday Crossword CITY STRUCTURES by Gail Grabowski

Edited by Stanley Newman www.stanxwords.com

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down. Clues include: 1 Celebrity, 5 "Cut it out!", 9 Circle or square, 14 Havana's home, 15 Domesticated, 16 A tad too inquisitive, 17 Considerably, 18 Region, 19 More than sufficient, 20 Land along the Mississippi, 22 Annoying individuals, 23 Foot-operated lever, 24 Initiate a duel, 26 Apartment fee, 29 Book of maps, 32 NASA concern, 36 "I dropped it!", 38 Choir voice, 40 Curved entryway, 41 South American mountains, 42 Guided vacation, 43 Lima's locale, 44 Rise in the sky, 45 Kids with curfews, 46 Birdcage feature, 48 Community gym site, 50 Gourmet cook, 52 Up in the air, 56 Hiding place, 59 Conservative group, 63 Bring forth, 64 Civil unrest, 65 Overture follower, 9 Get short with, 10 Where the catcher squats, 11 Vile vipers, 12 Animal skin, 13 Facial features, 21 Hard to find, 25 Scottish miss, 27 Forbidden thing, 28 NBC morning show, 30 Lotion additive, 31 Astound, 32 Patsy, 33 Get ready, for short, 34 Land measure, 35 Beer-bottle opener, slangily, 37 Salon wave, 39 Hospital sites: Abbr., 41 Tennis great Arthur, 45 Locker room powder, 47 One-word toast, 49 Royal residence, 51 Strength, 53 Scarlett of fiction, 54 Adjust a camera, 55 Carries around, 56 Copper-coated coin, 57 State with confidence, 58 Small bay, 60 Tall-tale teller, 61 Raggedy Ann, e.g., 62 Shopping aid