



NEWSBRIEFS

Heart speaker

Gary Terry had been successful in lobbying the Texas Legislature to place more automated external defibrillators (AEDs) in high traffic areas of public transportation. Little did he realize his efforts would actually save his own life. Terry, an executive with Southwestern Bell, collapsed from sudden cardiac arrest in a Texas airport and required use of an AED to shock his heart back into normal rhythm. Two other lives have since been saved at the El Paso International Airport courtesy of the AEDs installed there. Few have a more personal account to give, and Terry will give his as guest speaker during the 25th Anniversary Heart Ball on Saturday, Feb. 8, 2003 at the Camino Real Hotel. The American Heart Association seeks to "reduce the risk of coronary disease and stroke by 25 percent by the year 2010," and the Ball is a primary fundraising event to help reach that goal. An AED and a 2003 C230 Silver Mercedes Coupe will be raffled during the evening. Table reservations for the black-tie event are now being taken at 833-1231.

Holiday fuel

Motorists will see mostly stable gas prices throughout the Southwest travel region during the New Year holiday period, according to Triple-A New Mexico Gas Watch, though fuel prices in Amarillo jumped three cents. Flagstaff, Arizona, on the other hand, saw a seven-cent drop in prices. El Paso gas prices should hold at an average of \$1.35 per gallon — the record high for this county was \$1.55 in mid-May of 2001. The national average is \$1.42 per gallon. While Triple-A recommends aggressive gas price shopping as motorists do their holiday driving, it also warns that winter storms are nothing to trifle with and motorists should keep a healthy reserve in the gas tank.

Ultimate souvenir

Tattoos have been called the ultimate souvenir but both the practice of "skin art" and body piercing carries other worries besides how well it will look on you when you turn 80. Because these forms of body decoration cut into the skin, the procedure can be risky. The Texas Department of Health officials say Hepatitis B and C, staph bacteria and HIV infections can be transmitted during the procedure. "This is an industry that comes in contact with blood and bodily fluids on a constant basis," said Stephen Beekman, a TDH official. Over 400 tattoo and body piercing studios are monitored by the TDH as to whether they meet equipment sterilization requirements, that jewelry is individually packaged and sterile, and that clients meet age requirements. Call 512-719-0237 for information on specific studios.

A wise man reflects before he speaks; a fool speaks and then reflects on what he has uttered.

— Quips and Quotes



REWARDED — Ericka Orona and Luis Humberto Najera each received a TV/VCR for their perfect attendance at Campestre Elementary School in Socorro ISD.

Perfect attendance pays off for Campestre students

EAST EL PASO COUNTY — It pays to go to school.

At least it does for two Campestre Elementary School second graders, Ericka Orona and Luis Humberto Najera. Their reward for perfect attendance for the current school year was a Sylvania TV/VCR unit, plus the knowledge gained and the friends they've made.

Southwestern Bell, now known as SBC Communications, donated two 13-inch units, one each to a boy and a girl, with perfect attendance during the first semester of school.

During a Dec. 18 holiday program at Socorro High School, SBC officials Rose Acevedo, Jenny Fodies and Martha Larkin announced that Orona and Najera would receive the units — the only children so honored in the Socorro schools.

Najera was not present, but Orona was excited, and a bit confused. "My mom was really surprised, and didn't know what to think."

But she says the first tape she'll play on her new unit is "Powder Puff Girls." And Najera says "Blade" is first on his list of movies.

Physicians say unless you are sick already black mold probably won't hurt you

AUSTIN — Families flee their homes, school children are abruptly relocated to other buildings, and companies — even governments — suddenly interrupt operations and move.

The cause? Is it urban warfare or perhaps a new anthrax scare?

No, this menace, black mold, has been around centuries longer than any of the people or places currently under siege.

But black mold is growing in the walls of peoples' leaky homes, creeping up air conditioning chutes, and sickening everyone who breathes its spores. Right?

Not so fast, say Texas physicians. The Texas Medical Association's Council on Scientific Affairs just released a report on the subject. Their conclusion: For most people, the threat is not so real. Black mold poses a potential health risk only to those who have respiratory allergies to *Stachybotrys chartarum* (black mold) spores or who have rare inflammatory lung diseases.

The full report is available on the web at <http://www.texasmed.org/has/CSA%20Black%20Mold.doc>.

"There was a fundamental disconnect between what we knew as clinicians and what we were seeing in the public media," said Ed McClusky, MD, chair of the council that authored the report. "Our goal was an opportunity to try to close the gap between what the

public was being told and what medical science had to say about the issue."

The group conducted a review of medical and scientific literature, and consulted Texas and national experts. They report finding no scientific basis to support the perceived widespread threat to humans who inhale *Stachybotrys chartarum* spores.

"After reviewing available data, the council has concluded that public concern for adverse health effects from inhalation of *Stachybotrys* spores in water-damaged buildings is generally not supported by available peer-reviewed reports in medical literature," the report reads.

The council's report, which was approved by TMA's governing body, the House of Delegates, cites only two types of cases in which human exposure to black mold was thought to have caused illness: hypersensitivity pneumonitis — a rare inflammatory lung disease — in one patient, and pulmonary hemorrhage in infants.

In the latter report, *Stachybotrys mycotoxin* was suspected of causing some cases of bleeding in the lungs in infants. However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) dismissed that report for not having used the most rigorous scientific methodology.

As a result of its findings, the group suggests

Socorro mayor says there is a difference between an open door and wasted time

By Francis D. Shrum
Courier Staff Writer

SOCORRO — In response to a *Courier* article last week in which some Socorro City Council members made accusations that



SWORN TO SERVE — Irma Sanchez says she'll gladly listen to people with a positive attitude and an open mind.

Socorro Mayor Irma Sanchez has failed to practice an "open door policy," the first woman elected to lead this historic Lower Valley city says there is a big difference between having an open door and opening the door to wasted time.

"First of all, it should be clarified that I do practice my open door policy. There is a difference between an open door policy with constituents, and an open door policy with council members," Sanchez said Monday, stating that she has been forced to make revisions because some council members have failed to show common courtesy.

"Every constituent that comes into City Hall and asks to see me is seen. No appointments required. As for my open door policy with council members it has also been open; however, they have opted to shut the door on themselves," Sanchez said.

"Some members need to learn that there is such a thing as office etiquette. When there is a constituent or an employee in my office, you do not barge in. You wait your turn.

"Furthermore, I will not tolerate other council members divulging confidential information that is discussed in my office. The office of the Mayor is not a playground for the taking and bringing of gossip. It is there to conduct the much-needed everyday business of running a city," she said.

Sanchez further said that Council members accusations of lack of communication stem from their own lack of research and diligence in oversight of the various departments they are charged with managing.

"As for the communication bit, it is not my job to take the council members by the hand and tell them what to do in their appointed departments. It is up to them to oversee their departments and represent their districts as they were elected to do. It is not my job to spoon-feed them every detail that happens in the city.

"It is up to them, under definition of a public servant, to come into city hall regularly to find out what is going on, rather than listen to watered-down truths and act upon them.

"Moreover," Sanchez said, "there is more to being a public servant than inheriting the



One perspective

By Francis Shrum

Thankful for much

The clock ticks past midnight. Folks party into the wee hours of the morning of the first day of the "new year." We flip the page on the calendar and start writing a lot of checks with the wrong date.

What does it all mean?

Well, for some folks, it means they decide they are going to change their lives for the better. It is a new beginning for them. They decide to lose weight, start exercising, stop drinking, brush their teeth everyday, improve their job skills, stop smoking, get their finances under control, or spend more time with their kids.

Unfortunately, statistics show that most "New Year's Resolutions," no matter how admirable, have mighty short life spans, not the sort of longevity you want for life-changing commitments.

These kinds of changes have little or nothing to do with the "new year." More to the point, if some of us wait for the new year to make necessary changes, chances are we won't be around to see it arrive.

For all of us, however, the Roman calendar upon which this civilization operates requires that we put a period at the end of some yearly sentences.

For me that means reviewing a lot about last year, and in doing so, it inevitably comes to mind how many times I've appreciated something during the past twelve months but didn't necessarily tell anybody about it.

And I've got a lot to be thankful for.

Most of our blessings involve other human beings. Our parents, our husbands or wives, our kids, brothers and

sisters, neighbors, friends and co-workers.

On a personal level, I'm thankful for a working situation that gives me opportunity to do a lot of different things all at once. I'm thankful for a boss that agrees that doing laundry, writing, homeschooling a couple of kids, editing news copy, cooking, baby-sitting a grandson and paying bills are all perfectly compatible pursuits. I'm thankful for a couple of kids who are willing to work with and around a schedule like that and still achieve some pretty remarkable results.

Personally, I'm thankful for a handful of people who make this newspaper work, who take up the slack, who keep the wheels turning and the pages filled.

I appreciate Dick Harshberger's steady dedication to make sure the papers get where they need to be every week, with his usual good humor and outgoing interest.

I appreciate Arleen Beard, who does hard time by attending night meetings and makes it make sense.

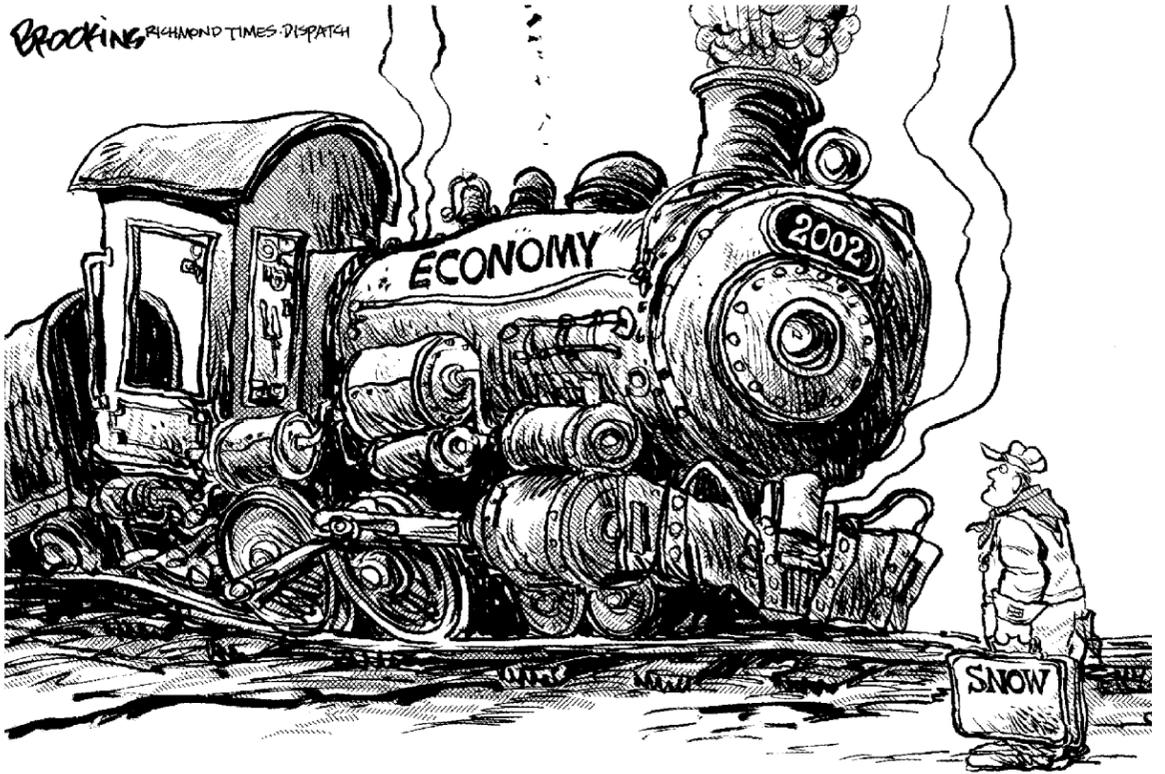
I appreciate all our other contributors, including Steve Escajeda, Don Woodyard and Michelle Brown, who brighten our pages with wit and wisdom.

I appreciate all the writers from various schools and organizations who give us the opportunity to spread some really good news, like Philip Cortez, Debra Dominguez and Alfredo Vasquez.

I especially appreciate a community of readers that keep picking up our publication, and, of course, our

See THANKFUL, Page 3

Brookings RICHMOND TIMES DISPATCH



THE NEW ENGINEER



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Reyes Reports By U.S. Rep. Silvestre Reyes

The joys of down-time in D.C. — time for some Hill housekeeping

With the House and Senate both out of session until Jan. 7 and most members of Congress back in their districts, one would think that things in D.C. are calm and quiet. Wrong! While the legislative schedule is fairly light — ok, non-existent — housekeeping priorities take precedence, and this year there is plenty of tidying up to do.

A room with a view? The view from the Capitol Building is captured in book, video, and the hearts of the millions of people who visit D.C. each year, but right now, a glimpse from the East Front of the Capitol is more reminiscent of a demolition zone than a postcard. The Architect of the Capitol is knee deep in metal and cement, and the cherry trees and tulips have been replaced by bulldozers and cranes. But the end will no doubt justify the means. After the dust clears, a new underground visitors center will open, complete with an expanded museum, new educational programs, movie theater, and plenty of tulips and cherry trees. The new center will open in 2005, and Capitol visit and tours continue despite the mess.

Meanwhile, back in House and Senate office buildings, it's lotto time. Members of Congress call upon their spouses, lucky friends and constituents, or favorite hill staffers to draw a number for them in an "only in D.C." style lottery. The winners of this lottery won't receive money, fame, fortune, or even prizes. This lottery is for office space. A few lucky members of Congress may score space in the elusive Rayburn building or even an office with a view of the Capitol Dome. Once the numbers are drawn, it's time to pack up the files and furni-

ture and start fighting for the freight elevators. New faces, new leadership: Let the swearing-in begin. Jan. 7, 51 individuals from different states, cities and backgrounds will arrive in Washington as new Members of Congress. These freshmen range in age from 29 to 69 and among the group are lawyers, farmers, a retired Marine colonel, a computer guru, and a child psychologist, not to mention a dozen or so former State Senators. Two of these new members, Linda Sanchez (CA-39) and Mario Diaz Balart (FL-25) round out the first two Hispanic sibling acts ever in the history of the U.S. Congress. They join sister Loretta Sanchez (CA-46) and brother Lincoln Diaz-Balart (FL-21). The scramble to find apartments on Capitol Hill rivals the fight for office space, but these rookies can't be distracted by the petty details. Their eyes are on committee assignments. The fight for coveted committee spots began Nov. 6, but we won't know which committees these newcomers will call home until mid-January.

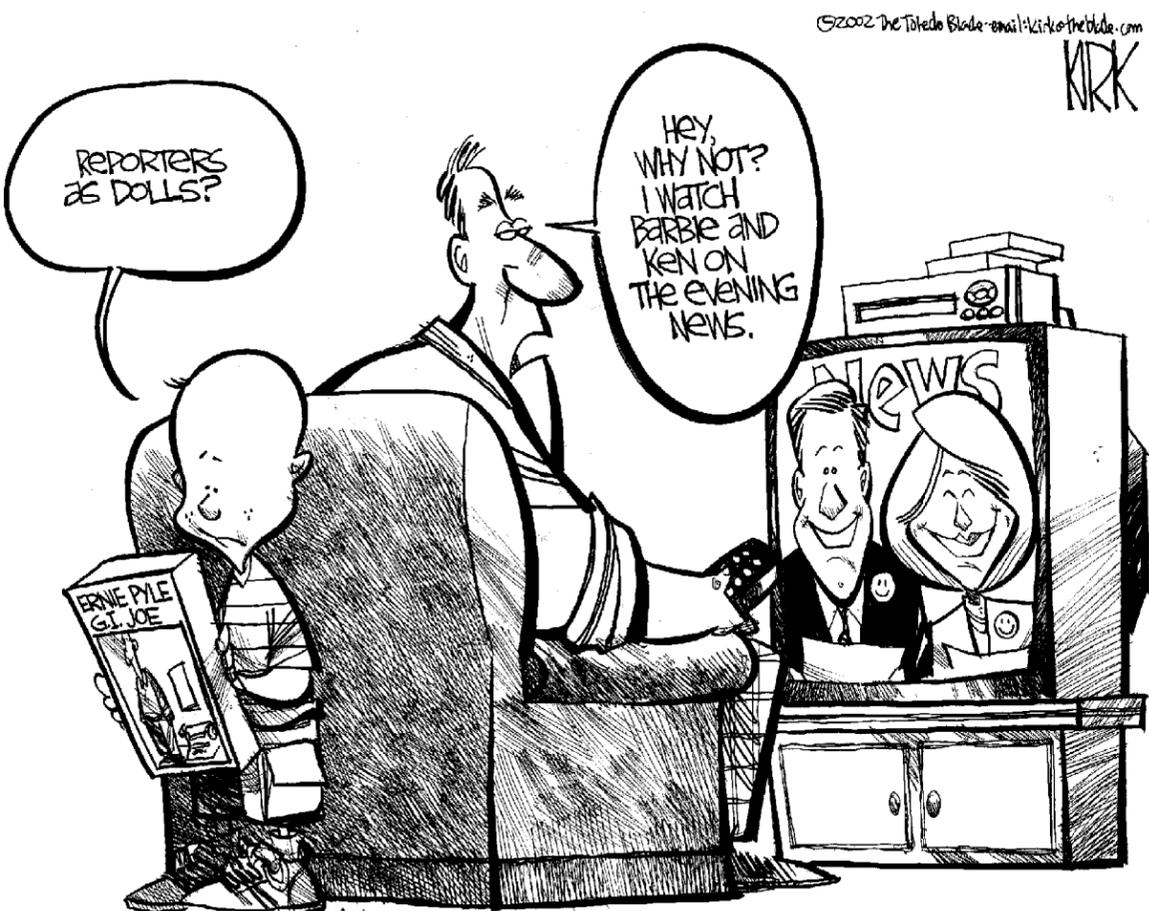
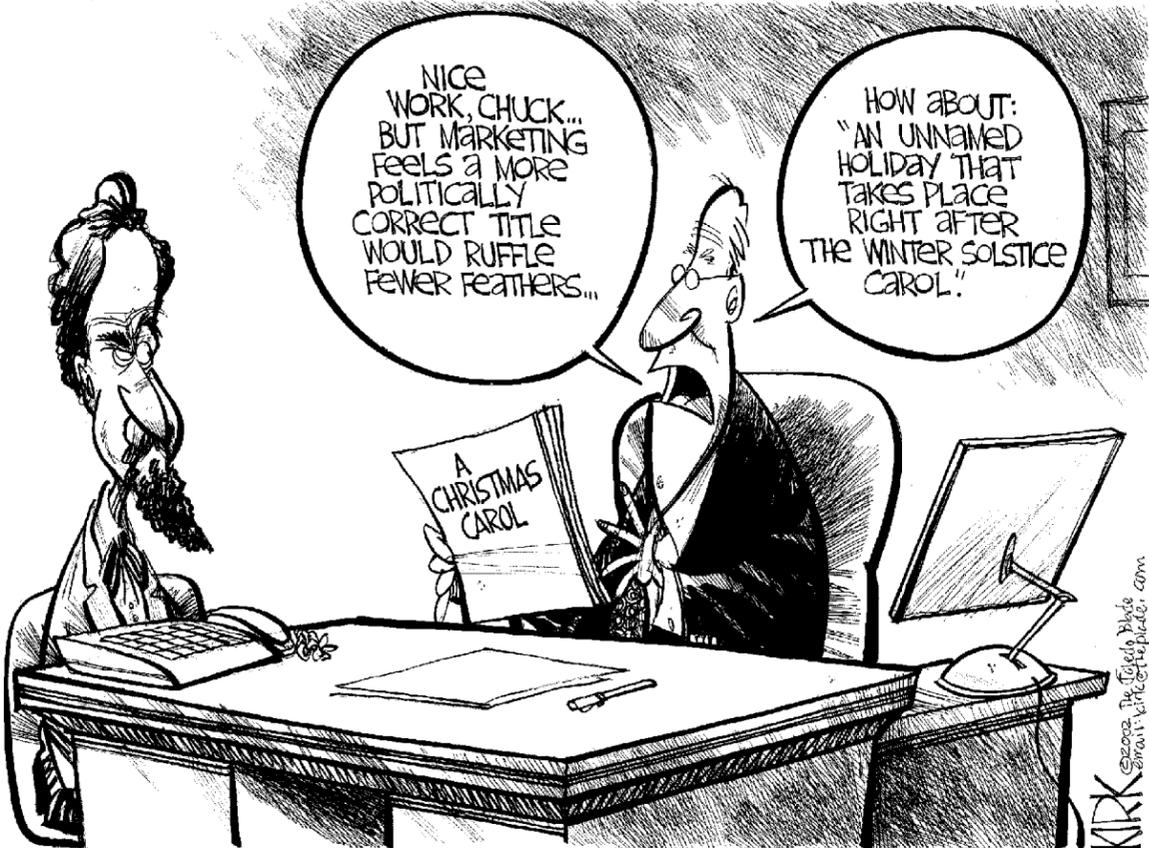
The hill veterans are not without their own battles. While Republicans struggle to find leadership in the Senate and move on from the embarrassing Trent Lott scandal, Democrats have their eye on the future. Al Gore's decision not to run for President in 2004 sparked a massive wave of contemplation among Democratic Presidential hopefuls. The buzz on the Senate side is that Sen. Daschle may step down as Minority Leader and go full-speed ahead in search of the Democratic nomination, leaving room for a new leader. Sen. Harry Reid of Nevada and Sen. Christopher Dodd of Connecticut have the early lead. Keep an eye on this one. It could get interesting.

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"SIR, THIS NEW WEAPONS INSPECTOR is NOT LIKE the OTHERS!... HE SEES US WHEN WE'RE SLEEPING, HE KNOWS WHEN WE'RE AWAKE... HE KNOWS WHEN WE'VE BEEN BAD or GOOD, so BE GOOD for GOODNESS SAKE!..."

IF CHARLES DICKENS WERE WRITING TODAY...



For Sanity's Sake By Taprina Milburn

New Year's list

I'm a list person. I make grocery lists, to-do lists, wish lists and seed lists. And for as long as I can remember, I've started the New Year with an inventory of what I will do more of or better in the 365 days to come.

The new year gives me the same feeling I have when I buy a new notebook. The blank pages are full of possibilities, because I get to fill them with whatever I choose.

So this year I will:

1. Enjoy the things I already own — knick-knacks, shoes, gadgets — instead of gathering more.
 2. Assume that all is well with family members and friends who haven't called in a while instead of assuming the worst.
 3. Toss out the self-help books and read more fiction novels.
 4. Count my blessings.
 5. Take more walks with my kids.
 6. Enjoy simple pleasures such as crawling beneath clean sheets or sitting in the sun.
 7. Ask more questions.
 8. Listen more.
 9. Watch my pennies.
 10. Spend less time worrying about the closet that needs organizing.
 11. Spend more time learning a skill.
 12. Make Sunday dinners and invite friends to our table.
 13. Finish the cross-stitch I started seven years ago.
 14. Remember to always have a prayer on my tongue.
 15. Know that I can accomplish goals if I work hard enough.
 16. Make new friends, but cherish the old friends.
 17. Learn how to work our digital camera.
 18. Learn how to program the VCR.
 19. Stop believing that technology will make my life simpler.
 20. Have a family game night.
 21. Work up a sweat more often.
 22. Make a toast.
 23. Encourage someone.
 24. Learn to do flips on the kids' trampoline.
 25. Go to the chiropractor/get a massage.
 26. Eat different foods — Twinkies, Ding Dongs.
 27. Volunteer my time.
 28. Stop rushing my kids out the door.
 29. Read old love letters.
 30. Think before I speak.
 31. Watch a sporting event.
 32. Be interested in another person's life and history.
 33. Pass books on to friends instead of cluttering my house with books I've already finished.
 34. Try not to take personally someone's crankiness.
 35. Buy a new notebook.
- Happy New Year.

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Mayor

From Page 1

title. At some point you need to roll up your sleeves and get to work, and that means not picking up your agenda packets an hour before the meeting. How can you make an educated decision that affects 30,000 people without the proper knowledge?"

Sanchez said that because some council members do not take the time to study the facts of various projects they subject themselves to misinformation from other unreliable sources and therefore are not capable of making informed decisions. This practice, Sanchez said, keeps them from fulfilling the public trust they have been given.

"The bottom line is that I, as the

Mayor, who is employed by the constituents, see it as my responsibility to fulfill the duties of my office which I was sworn to do to its fullest capacity. I swore to preserve, protect and defend my community.

"If there is anyone who has been fulfilling all those duties, it is me; and, if there is anyone out there who disputes that, by all means please come by and visit, and we can talk about it.

"My door is always open to everyone that comes in with a positive attitude and open mind. However, my door will remain shut to negativity, closed minds, under-mining, tongue twisters, and gossip.

"Remember, to grasp and hold a vision and to make it a reality is the very essence of successful leadership, and that is exactly what I have done for my constituents," she said.

Thankful

From Page 2

advertisers.

Thank you.

I also appreciate the fact that once a week, through this column, I have an opportunity to explore and examine human behavior, bazaar as it may be from time to time. Just writing it down helps me keep it in perspec-

tive, so to speak.

Just across the border, within a few miles of where I sit, the new year celebrations are particularly lively, where this midnight hour is often greeted with firing from the roof tops the family firearm of choice, be it a rifle, handgun or AK-47 — a practice the Juarez police say they are cracking down on this year, because, afterall, what goes up must come down...

View from here By Jeff Judson

Who will rescue Texas from high insurance premiums?

Recently, my wife and I received our homeowner's insurance renewal notice and were shocked. If we continue our current level of coverage, our premium will almost triple in cost. If we reduce our insurance, by getting rid of mold coverage, our premium will still double!

Such skyrocketing insurance premiums are an outrage and like all Texans, I want to know who is responsible.

Of course, a primary suspect is my insurance company. After shopping around for less expensive coverage, I am finding that few companies will sell us a policy — at any price. Even worse, the second largest homeowners insurer in Texas (Farmers) announced they were leaving the Texas market altogether and virtually giving away their 700,000 policyholders to their competitors.

Yet at the same time, Texas politicians are talking about the "unfair" rate increases they propose to stop by

"freezing premiums." They also are proposing to more heavily regulate the industry, as if companies want to price themselves out of business. I know enough about the laws of economics to know that when companies are profitable in a competitive market, they try to sell more of their product, not less, and at cheaper prices.

While such calls for more regulation by politicians are designed to make them look macho, it is the height of irresponsibility — and the voters know it.

People are wising up to the facts about mold claims and their relation to high premiums. According to the Texas Department of Insurance, Texas mold claims rose from \$153 million in 2000 to \$854 million in 2001, a 558 percent increase. The number of claims per 1000 policyholders increased from 2.9 in 2000 to 15.1 in 2001. The average cost of

mold claims per policyholder in 2001 was almost \$350, up from \$63 per policyholder in 2000.

Worst of all, 70 percent of all mold claims filed nationally were filed in Texas

What makes Texas unique when it comes to mold is the way our state regulates insurance and the amount of lawsuit abuse for which we consumers pay. This is why Texas has the highest homeowners premiums in the country: regulations and trial lawyers.

Measured against other states, Texas insurance is heavily regulated. New Jersey is considered the most heavily regulated state for automobile insurance, and their problems are remarkably similar to those of Texas — high premiums and few insurers who want to sell insurance there. Texas has the distinction of having the highest homeowners premiums in the country, but it isn't due to a lack of regulation.

In Texas, state regulators have been particularly obstinate about even modest deregulation. For instance, in 1997 the Texas legislature authorized the Department of Insurance, like in most other states, to allow insurers to offer cost-saving mold exclusions

to their policyholders. Texas regulators did not bother to approve the exclusion until 2002.

Personal injury trial lawyers are milking mold for everything it is worth. Seminars are being hosted around the country teaching lawyers how to generate insurance mold claims. Even though there is no proven scientific link between mold and illness beyond mere allergies, an entire industry has built up in Texas to test for and "remediate" homes.

Only fundamental reforms in Texas will bring down our premiums. Our insurance climate must be improved to attract more insurers back into the state to enhance competition and provide for more consumer choice.

Other states, like Illinois and Wisconsin, have shown less regulation and fewer lawsuits equal lower premiums and more consumer protection. What better way to protect consumers than to promote efficiency and competition leading to lower premiums? Even more telling, insurance is simply not a political issue in those states.

Texas has a long way to go to reduce lawsuit abuse. Virtually no tort reform has emerged from the Texas

House of Representatives since 1997 because leaders there were beholden to trial lawyers.

Irrational regulations and frivolous lawsuits have given us the problems we have today. It is time for a change. But who will lead us there?

Jeff Judson is the Past-president and CEO of the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a non-profit research institute focusing on state policy issues. In the early 1990s, Mr. Judson was Industry Affairs Director for USAA responsible for issues related to property and casualty insurance regulation in Texas.



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! Scott Arthur Masear
"After my medical license was revoked, I tried robbing banks, but no one could read my stickup notes."

Mold

From Page 1

that water damage remediation in buildings continue for non-clinical reasons only. "We're not trying to say that water doesn't produce mold in homes and there are not situations where that should be remediated, but it should not be based on a general concern that the mold is causing adverse health effects — unless subsequent proof comes forward," Dr. McClusky said.

The council suggested specific scientific criteria for proving that black mold is harmful to humans and whether an individual patient's illness is due to black mold. The report also encourages more research regarding the impact of molds, and education of TMA physician members.

The committee recommended publicizing this information and sending it to other entities, including the Texas Attorney General, Texas Department of Health, and Texas Department of Insurance (TDI). The

state's insurance regulatory agency has been forced to face this topic as insurance companies threaten to stop offering certain homeowners coverage or to leave the state altogether due to mold claims Farmers Insurance Group just announced plans to abandon Texas' homeowners insurance market.

The amount in mold claim losses in 2001 exceeded \$854 million, according to TDI. That amounts to a 460 percent increase in such claims over the previous year. Homeowners statewide are seeing insurance pre-

miums skyrocket. Insurers are not the only companies affected by the business of mold. Mold remediation services have been in great demand across the state, as homeowners and businesses scramble to dry out and clean up moldy messes.

"TMA has learned that no universal standards for mold testing exist. And we are concerned that there are no education or training requirements for testers or remediators working in Texas," said Kim Ross, TMA's Vice President for Public Policy.

TMA's Council on Scientific Af-

fairs urges the medical science community to remain diligent. "We will continue, and medical science will continue, to keep an open mind and support additional research to look into this area," Dr. McClusky added.

(TMA is the largest state medical society in the nation, representing more than 37,000 physician and medical student members. It is located in Austin and has 119 component county medical societies around the state. TMA's key objective is to improve the health of all Texans.)



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SELF-HELP OPPORTUNITIES

Alcoholics Anonymous Group Paso Del Norte meets at 8501 Kingsway in Westway, Monday-Saturday, 8 p.m. Call 886-4948 for information.

Alcohólicos Anónimos Grupo Paso Del Norte sesiones lunes a sábado, a 8-9 de la tarde, 8501 Kingsway, Westway. 886-4948 para información.

Persons who have a problem with alcohol are offered a free source of help locally. Alcoholics Anonymous Group 8 de Enero meets at 15360 Horizon Blvd. in Horizon City on Mondays through Saturdays at 8 p.m. Call 859-0484 for information.

Tiene problemas con el alcohol? Hay una solución. Visitemos. Alcohólicos Anónimos, Grupo 8 de Enero, 15360 Horizon Blvd., Horizon City, sesiones lunes a sábado a 8 de la tarde. Información: 859-0484.

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So much to look forward to: Sports predictions for 2003

By Steve Escajeda
Special to the Courier

I have a knack for predicting the sports future. So here are my *predictions* for the sports year 2003. I've narrowed them down to 10 categories.

Mr. Good Guy

In a surprising change of events, Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones earns the title of Mr. Good Guy by keeping Dave Campo as the coach of the team. He also keeps Emmitt Smith, all his assistant coaches and his two quarterbacks Chad Hutchinson and Quincy Carter. Jones said he has finally seen the light and has put more emphasis on people's feelings than on his own team's bottom line. Oh, and by the way, the Cowboys finish 2003 with a 2-14 record.

Mr. Bad Guy

None other than the Lakers' Shaquille O'Neal. Seems Shaq will be involved in the scandal of the year. Shaq will announce, dur-

ing a summer press conference that he and Hillary Clinton have been having a seven-year affair. The two will make the arrangements needed to be together. When asked about the impending divorce, former president Bill Clinton said that he was heart-broken but added that there was still time to reconsider and live a happy life. The president was asked if he still loved Hillary that much? Clinton answered, "Who's talking about Hillary?"

Ms. Good Guy

Former Cincinnati Reds owner Marge Schott returns to the spotlight in 2003 to show her soft and more sensitive side. Schott goes so far as to openly declare her love for the man of her dreams. Schott says that now that his schedule is open, she will become Mrs. Trent Lott sometime in June. Of course, the wedding will be a segregated one.

Ms. Bad Guy

Making her third appearance in this category, Tanya Harding makes yet another appearance in front of a judge. Seems this time the figure-

skater-turned-hit-person ran onto the field at an NBA game and attacked Dallas Maverick's seven-foot, six-inch center Shawn Bradley. Harding, who was under the influence of cheap wine, took a cane onto the floor, held it above her head and took a whack at Bradley. Because of the strategic location of the blow, Bradley never played basketball again, but he was able to join the Mormon Tabernacle choir.

Comeback of the Year

After a few years out of the NBA, Charles Barkley will return to play for the Los Angeles Lakers. Barkley will average 11 points a game and 7.4 rebounds per contest. When asked what the toughest thing about coming back to the NBA was, the 412-pound Barkley said the toughest thing was entering and exiting the team bus.

Smartest Move of the Year

The smartest move in 2003 was made by Pete Rose, who was allowed back into professional baseball and into the Hall of Fame by commissioner Bud Selig, after finally admitting that

he bet on baseball. Rose went a step further and admitted that he bet on Cincinnati Reds games. Rose was so taken by it all that he also admitted to being responsible for three crop circles, the faked Big Foot video and the resurgence of Carrot Top's career.

Coach of the Year

Because of the change in his demeanor, Texas Tech's Bobby Knight will emerge as the coach of the year. Knight's Red Raiders finished the season with a 23-8 record. Not bad but even more remarkable was the fact that Knight threw no chairs, choked no players and insulted no secretaries. Knight gave money to charity and even showed up to one press conference caressing a puppy. Knight says his change is due to a doctor's controversial procedure. "It's remarkable what a snip here and a clip there can do," Knight said.

Player of the year

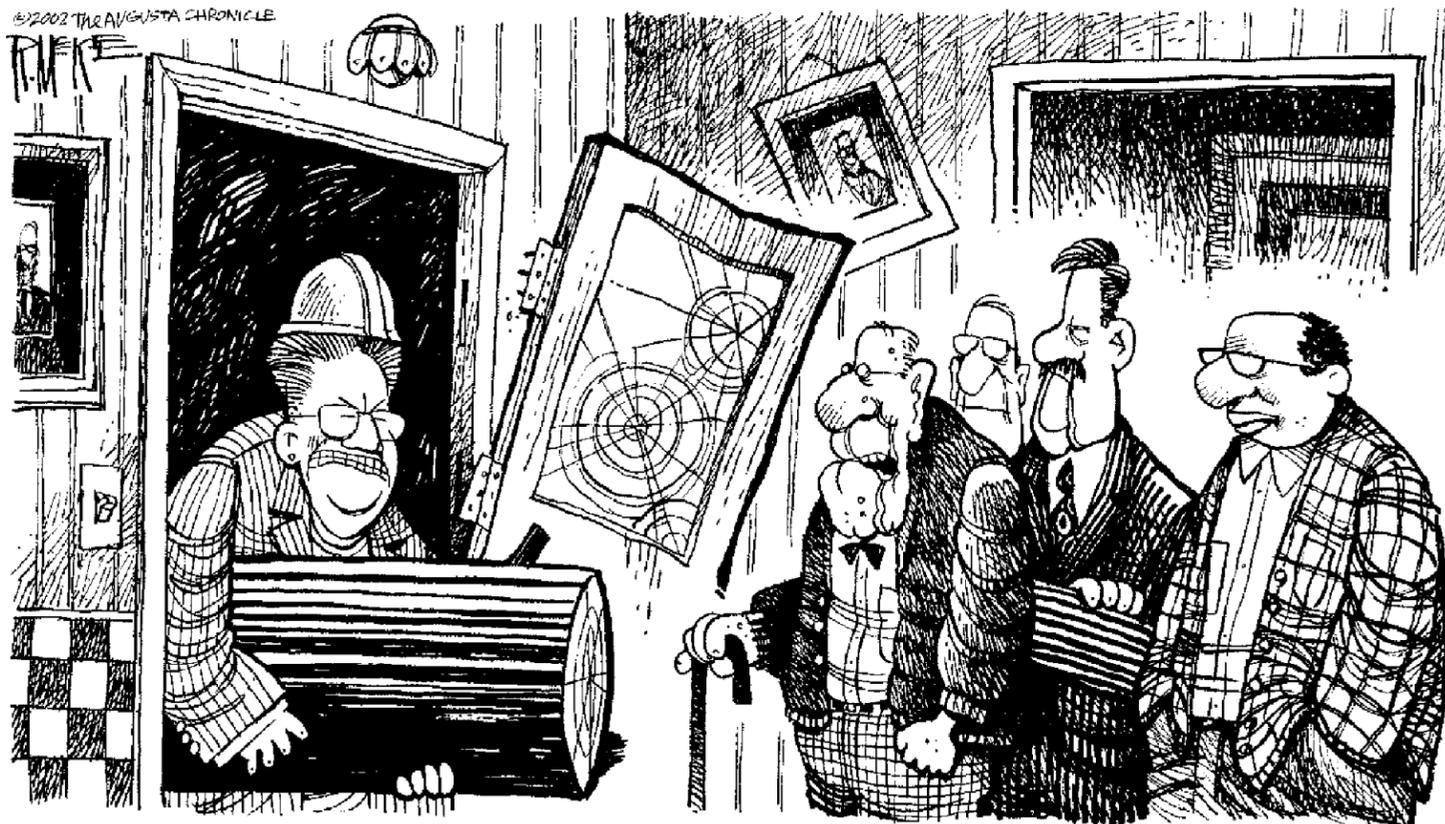
The player that will stand out the most in 2003 is the Seattle Mariners' Ichiro Suzuki. Ichiro will stun the baseball world by breaking Barry Bonds' home run mark. Ichiro will hit his 74th home run on the last day of the season, an inside-the-park homer in the bottom of the eighth inning. The inside-the-park home run was the 68th of the season for the lightning-fast Ichiro, who attributed his speed to his new diet of sushi and jalapenos.

Scariest Moment of the Year

There were many scary sports moments in 2003 but the winner involved new Dallas Cowboys coach Jimmy Johnson. Johnson comes back to the Cowboys in 2003 and leads the team to a 10-6 record. The scary moment came when owner Jerry Jones almost lost an eye getting too close to Johnson's hair during a hug.

Jerk of the Year

This was the closest race of the year. Some of the candidates included Mike Tyson, John Rocker, Terrell Owens, Rick Fox, Roger Clemens and Don King. The winner of the 2003 Jerk of the Year goes to tennis star Monica Seles. The 286-pound Seles is fined by the league for breaking into the other player's lockers and stealing their high-energy snacks. Seles apologized and said the pressure just got to her. Seles does recover, however, in time to model big-women's clothing with her friend, Lewinski. The line is simply called "Monica."



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King Super Crossword

NOVEL BEGINNINGS

- ACROSS**
- 1 "One _ Apple" ('71 song)
 - 4 Broadway org.
 - 9 Presidential pouch
 - 13 Loudly, to Liszt
 - 18 Spud bud
 - 19 Propped (up)
 - 21 Author Murdoch
 - 22 Menotti title character
 - 23 Over-laundered muumuu?
 - 26 Aquarium fish
 - 27 Viscount's better
 - 28 Walked off with
 - 29 Baby beagle
 - 31 Noun suffix
 - 32 Objective
 - 35 Lose luster
 - 38 One of the Sopranos
 - 41 Embarrassed late-night host?
 - 48 Humble abode
 - 49 Hawke of "Training Day"
 - 50 Start to cry?
 - 51 Pageant prop
 - 54 Jack of "Rio Lobo"
 - 56 Dicta
 - 59 Seek change?
 - 62 Coasted
 - 63 Cock and bull
 - 65 Sup in style
 - 66 "Rule Britannia" composer

- 68 Call _ day
- 69 Fill in
- 71 _ Scotia
- 73 Sculptor Bernini
- 74 Snead or Spiegel
- 75 Tarzan the Studious?
- 80 Ingot
- 82 Airhead
- 83 Fruit-tree spray
- 84 Biol. or chem. character
- 85 _ Dhabi
- 86 Art deco designer
- 87 Sicilian volcano
- 89 Humble abode
- 93 Gershwin heroine
- 95 Wordless greeting
- 96 "Every _ You Take" ('83 hit)
- 98 Cheer competitor
- 99 Singer John
- 101 Organ of equilibrium
- 103 Maguire of "Spider-Man"
- 106 Singer Barry
- 107 Undecided activists?
- 113 Roman writer
- 114 Hit hard
- 115 Reverence
- 116 It may be fake
- 117 Author Umberto
- 119 Adjusted an Amati
- 123 Lhasa _
- 127 Come in
- 130 Good source of minerals?

- DOWN**
- 1 Actress Neuwirth
 - 2 Auel heroine
 - 3 Forest beauty
 - 4 Request
 - 5 "Quiet!"
 - 6 Dove sounds
 - 7 In _ (bored)
 - 8 Cuban currency
 - 9 Evergreen tree
 - 10 Exist
 - 11 Speech problem
 - 12 Take for granted
 - 13 Too big for one's breeches?
 - 14 Doolittle's digs
 - 15 Type of philosophy
 - 16 Hurl
 - 17 Panache
 - 20 Dutch pottery
 - 24 Sitka's st.
 - 25 Work in Vegas
 - 30 By means of
 - 33 Cover the cake
 - 34 Wrestling surface
 - 36 Labor leader

- Eugene
- 37 WWII area
- 39 Qty.
- 40 Emcee's site
- 41 '54 James Arness film
- 42 A shake in the grass?
- 43 List ender
- 44 Pi follower
- 45 Cooking fat
- 46 Close
- 47 Trinidad's neighbor
- 52 Moreno or Hayworth
- 53 Inspector Dalglish
- 55 Engage, as gears
- 57 " _ Gay"
- 58 Party animal
- 60 Palladino of "ER"
- 61 Behaves like a beaver
- 64 Kid stuff?
- 67 Methuselah's dad
- 70 Borg or Ulvaeus
- 72 Subside
- 75 Reliable
- 76 As many as
- 77 Essential
- 78 Elaborate
- 79 Brilliant display
- 80 Movie piglet
- 81 Explorer Tasman
- 88 Energy source
- 90 Offensive
- 91 Churchill's

- successor
- 92 Time to give up
- 94 Head for the clouds
- 96 La _ Tar Pits
- 97 "Six Feet Under" network
- 100 Pro-gun grp.
- 102 PD alert
- 104 _ Marie Saint
- 105 Evergreen tree
- 108 Expert
- 109 The gods guzzle it
- 110 _ Spumante
- 111 Newscaster
- Connie
- 112 Nut part
- 113 Feeling
- 116 Dread
- 118 Phil Donahue's birthplace
- 120 Neighbor of Mont.
- 121 Gaelic
- 122 Luke, Bo, or Daisy
- 124 Prepares cherries
- 125 Glasgow guy
- 126 Hunky-dory
- 128 Accounting abbr.
- 129 Singer Tommy
- 131 Maestro de Waart
- 132 Hat for 125 Down
- 133 Game pieces
- 134 Canonized Mlle.

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Column reveals first stage of Britney's career

By Don Flood

It's not so much that Britney Spears already has a book about herself that bothers me, it's the title — "Stages."

Stages! She's only 21! How many stages could she have been through?

But fortunately for you, dear reader, you don't have to read the book.

I am able to channel Britney's thoughts to provide you with the First Stage of Miss Spears' career — beginning with her early, frustrating days in the womb, to her first performance in the delivery room and finally up to age 14 days, a crucial turning point in her life as a creative artist:

In the womb, two months: I sense something Very Big is going to happen: ME! I am going to be born in seven months!

Four months: I'm still very small but already I can tell that I am going to be totally HOT!

Six months: There's no stage in here! Just practicing my concert routine has become a struggle.

Eight months: Only one more month till I'm born and still no word on an agent. I wonder if Christina Aguilera has been born yet! As if I care!

Birth: My first performance! I emerge into the world and immediately open my act: kicking, waving my arms, wailing away.

They eat it up! My first audience and I own them! They can't take their eyes off me!

The doctor pats me gently and seems somewhat surprised when I belt out, "Hit me, Baby, one more time!"

Right away, Mom and Dad both say that I am a

Beautiful Baby.

It's nice to hear, of course, but I'm a little disappointed that nobody says I am Totally Hot.

When I look at myself, I see why.

I am so out of shape! Nine months of lying around the womb have turned me into a poster child for baby fat!

I have flabby arms, chubby thighs, my abs are like Jell-O and I don't even want to talk about my butt.

But my Dad *actually* says, "Oh, look at those pudgy little legs. They are so cute!"

No, Daddy, they're not! They're disgusting!

At this moment I learn an important lesson: If I am going to become a Major Star I can't rely upon the judgment of others. I have to set my own standards.

I resolve to start doing sit-ups the next morning. Unfortunately I'm too weak to even lift my head.

My Mom's no better than my Dad.

Every time I start crying she tries to feed me.

I don't want food, I try to tell her, I want to talk to my agent!

My clueless Mom thinks I'm "colicky," she doesn't understand the real reason behind my tears.

I have no recording contract, no concerts, no magazine covers.

I am now two weeks old, and my career — if you could even call it that — is going nowhere...

Stay tuned for Stage 2, where, after much trial and error, Britney finally fashions a "low-rider" diaper that shows off her bellybutton!

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HOP, SKIP AND JUMP — The After-School Soccer Program in Socorro ISD brought over 900 students on 56 teams hopping and skipping to Championships on Dec. 14. Helen Ball #2, Rojas and Campestre were victorious in their divisions.

After school sports program holds championships

EAST EL PASO COUNTY — Socorro ISD Community Outreach wants to have an after-school soccer program at every elementary campus — and that's no small order.

Undaunted, the district held Championship games Dec. 14 with 56 elementary school teams comprising over 900 students participating.

Dr. Adolfo Fernandez Jr., community outreach specialist with Socorro ISD KEYS Academy, said that Socorro's program is unique in that it is run entirely by parent volunteers who coach, referee and coordinate the teams.

There is no charge for students to participate and volunteers seek out their own sponsorships to provide uniforms and other sports equipment — all of which fits within the goals of the program.

"The goal of the program is to eliminate adverse student behavior in the long run by providing after-school activity for students," said Dr. Fernandez. "This promotes fun, participation, healthy physical and mental development, and parental and family involvement."

The program is open to both boys and girls.

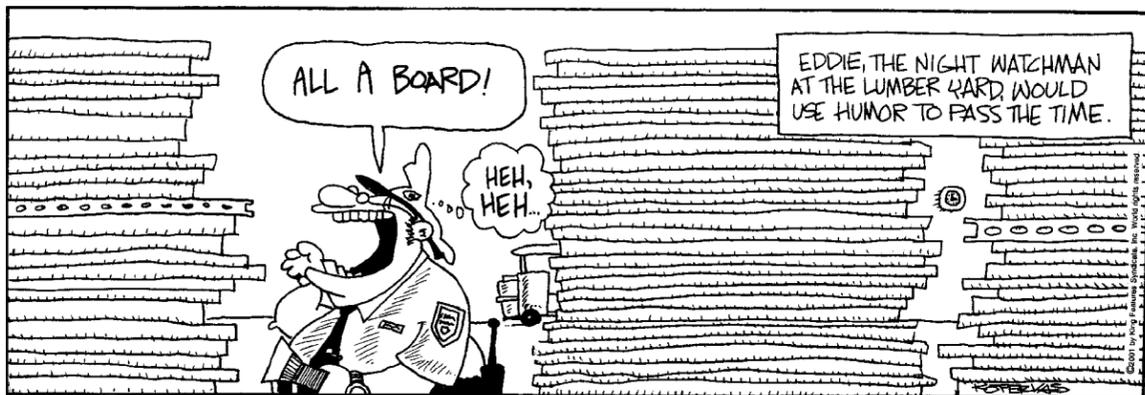
The Championship games were held in three divisions: Division A for students Pre-K through first grade; Division B for second and third graders; and Division C for grades fourth and fifth.

Helen Ball #2 team won in Division A followed by Myrtle Cooper and Hueco A; Rojas won Division B, followed by Benito Martinez #2 and Myrtle Cooper; and Campestre took Division C honors, followed by Rojas and Helen Ball #2.

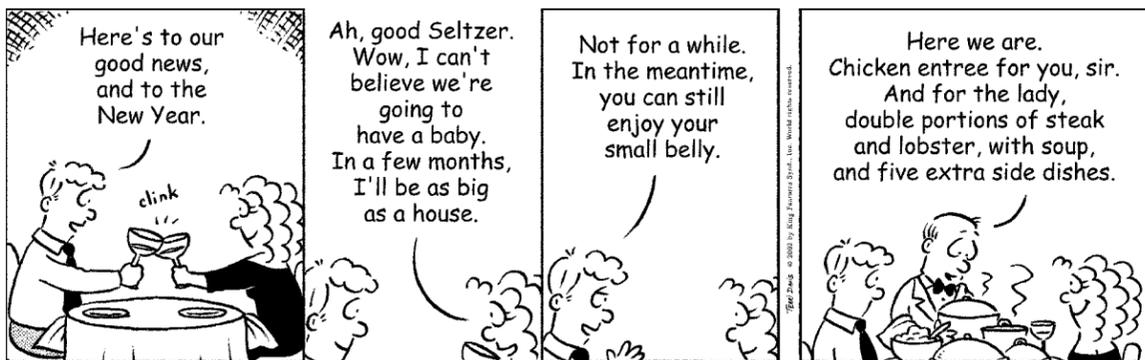
"In keeping with our district motto, *The New Frontier*, we seek to be the first district in the State of Texas that has the After-School Soccer Program available at every elementary school," Dr. Fernandez said.

Comix

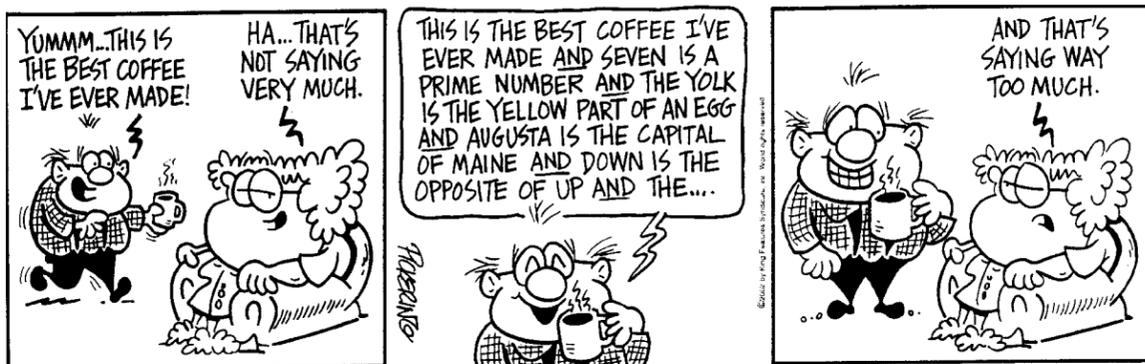
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GOT A LIFE By Terri Davis



THE SPATS By Jeff Pickering



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ELAM	ORDERS	BEG	SLID
MALES	DINE	ARNE	SITA
SUB	NOVA	GIAN	SAM
THE	JUNGLE	BOOK	WORM
BAR	DOPE	ALAR	SCI
ABU	ERTE	ETNA	HOVEL
BESS	NOD	BREATH	TIDE
ELTON	EAR	TOBEY	LEN
WAR	AND	PEACE	MOVEMENT
HORACE	BASH	AWE	
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Use of alternative fuels in fireplaces calls for an extra measure of caution

EL PASO COUNTY — It's becoming a tradition. A roaring fire in the fireplace on a cold winter's day. And in more and more Texas homes, the energy for that brightly burning fireplace is coming from propane, the state's number one alternative fuel.

Dan Kaszuba of Amerigas warns that homeowners who rely on propane as a residential fuel should have their propane gas log and fireplace systems checked at the outset of the winter season. "Homeowners can schedule a gas appliance safety check with us, says Dan. "We'll send a trained

technician to inspect the fireplace unit, clean the control compartments and burner, and check all components for proper operation."

Homeowners should also be aware of the type of propane fireplace they own: direct-vent or vent-free. A direct-vent unit requires outside air to support combustion in its sealed combustion chamber and is typically installed on an outside wall. The outside vent should be checked periodically to make sure that it is free of debris; a blocked air vent results in a poorly burning flame.

Kaszuba said vent-free gas hearths, logs and free-standing stove units are

growing in popularity. They rely on inside air to support combustion and vent directly into a room. Newer types of unvented units must have an oxygen-depletion sensor which will automatically turn off the unit should the oxygen drop below a specified level.

Homeowners should also familiarize themselves with the "rotten egg" odor of propane. If you smell gas, whether the fireplace or stove unit is operating or not, follow these steps: do not touch electric switches, light matches or use the telephone; exit the dwelling immediately; call your propane supplier or the fire department

from a neighbor's phone.

Troy Hicks the west Texas market coordinator for the Texas Railroad Commission's Alternative Fuels Research and Education Division also suggests that homeowners who fuel furnaces and appliances with propane put their propane delivery accounts on "automatic," to make sure they will have enough gas no matter how cold the weather or treacherous the road conditions.

For more information on how to stay warm safely with propane this winter, call the Railroad Commission's Alternative Fuels Division at (800) 64-CLEAR.

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WEATHER

AccuWeather.com

SEVEN-DAY FORECAST FOR EL PASO

WEDNESDAY	WED. NIGHT	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
▲ 56°	▼ 27°	▲ 53° ▼ 29°	▲ 58° ▼ 34°	▲ 59° ▼ 32°	▲ 58° ▼ 32°	▲ 62° ▼ 32°	▲ 64° ▼ 33°

UV INDEX Statistics for noon.

The higher the UV Index, the greater the need for eye and skin protection.

Wednesday	4	Low
Thursday	4	Low
Friday	4	Low
Saturday	4	Low
Sunday	4	Low
Monday	4	Low
Tuesday	4	Low

REAL FEEL TEMP™

The exclusive AccuWeather composite of the effects of temperature, wind, humidity, sunshine, precipitation, and elevation on the human body.

Wednesday	52°
Thursday	42°
Friday	44°
Saturday	44°
Sunday	42°
Monday	32°
Tuesday	33°

AGRICULTURE

Today will be mainly sunny with near-seasonable temperatures. The relative humidity will average 50 percent. Wind will be out of the northwest at 10-20 mph. The next few days will bring more sunshine and seasonable weather. No precipitation is expected for the next several days.

All maps, forecasts and data provided by AccuWeather, Inc. ©2003

TEXAS WEATHER

Anthony	56	27
Canutillo	57	28
Clint	55	28
E. Montana	56	27
Fabens	55	28
Horizon	57	28
San Elizario	54	25
Socorro	55	26
Tornillo	55	28
Vinton	57	28

Shown is Wednesday's weather. Temperatures are Wednesday's highs and Wednesday night's lows.



TRAVELERS CITIES

City	Wed. Hi/Lo/W	Thur. Hi/Lo/W	Fri. Hi/Lo/W	Sat. Hi/Lo/W	Sun. Hi/Lo/W
Albuquerque	48/20/pc	47/25/s	54/28/s	50/25/pc	49/29/s
Atlanta	54/37/c	50/29/pc	46/29/pc	50/32/pc	50/35/c
Atlantic City	51/33/r	46/28/c	42/25/c	44/25/pc	46/33/pc
Austin/San Antonio	69/38/s	64/31/s	60/33/s	66/34/s	59/36/s
Baltimore	53/36/r	45/36/c	41/29/c	39/24/pc	43/35/c
Boston	46/34/r	40/32/c	38/30/c	36/26/pc	39/34/c
Chicago	36/24/c	30/20/sn	30/22/pc	34/23/c	34/26/sn
Dallas/Ft. Worth	61/35/pc	56/35/s	57/38/s	58/36/pc	55/33/s
Denver	40/20/pc	41/29/s	53/29/pc	44/27/s	48/27/c
Flagstaff	40/15/s	47/16/s	48/21/pc	45/20/pc	50/21/s
Houston	66/44/pc	62/38/s	62/40/s	68/48/pc	62/44/s
Kansas City	42/26/c	36/22/sf	42/26/pc	38/26/c	38/21/c
Las Vegas	56/34/pc	57/37/pc	61/43/pc	61/42/pc	64/39/s
Miami	79/64/t	76/60/pc	74/58/pc	73/62/s	77/65/sh
Minneapolis	25/18/sf	24/14/pc	28/18/pc	29/18/c	26/14/sf
New Orleans	64/45/pc	60/41/pc	58/41/s	61/45/pc	61/33/pc
New York City	50/36/r	42/32/c	38/30/c	38/28/pc	42/38/c
Philadelphia	50/36/r	42/34/c	40/29/c	38/26/pc	42/35/pc
Phoenix	64/43/s	68/44/s	68/47/s	72/46/pc	71/43/s
Portland	48/42/r	50/42/r	50/40/sh	50/43/r	50/45/c
San Francisco	58/44/pc	58/46/pc	60/46/pc	60/48/pc	59/49/pc
Seattle	48/42/r	50/40/r	50/40/sh	50/43/r	52/46/r
Tucson	63/37/s	68/39/s	67/41/s	72/41/s	71/41/s
Washington, DC	54/38/r	46/38/c	42/32/c	40/28/pc	46/39/c

Weather (W): s-sunny, pc-partly cloudy, c-cloudy, sh-showers, t-thunderstorms, r-rain, sf-snow flurries, sn-snow, i-ice.



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