



NEWSBRIEFS

Graduation ceremony

El Paso Community College (EPCC) will hold its Fall 2013 commencement exercises at 5:00 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 13, 2013 at the Don Haskins Center. A total of 1,403 degrees and certificates will be granted. The commencement speaker will be Dr. Wynn Rosser, President/CEO of the Greater Texas Foundation (GTF). Active in professional organizations, Rosser is vice-chair of the Grantmakers for Education Board of Directors and serves on the Board of Directors of the Texas Lyceum. He is also a lecturer and member of the graduate faculty in the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University. GTF is headquartered in Bryan, Texas. The foundation serves the citizens and educational institutions of Texas by supporting initiatives that increase rates of post-secondary enrollment and completion for all Texas students, with a particular focus on students who may encounter barriers to post-secondary success.

— Jim Heiney

Fine arts facility

A ribbon-cutting ceremony and gala was held on December 6, 2013 for the opening of Eastlake High School's Center for Performing Arts. The facility includes a state-of-the-art auditorium, dance studio, choir room and piano lab, costume shop and practice rooms for flags and mariachi students. The auditorium has 678 seats, cutting-edge stage lighting (LED and incandescent lights) and a state-of-the-art digital sound system that is the only one of its kind in the city's high schools. Mijares/Mora Architects designed the facility and Buford-Thompson Company constructed it. SISD superintendent Dr. José Espinoza and chairman for the Bond Accountability Committee Chairperson Robert Alvarez spoke at the ribbon-cutting ceremony. About 300 students from Eastlake High School performed in the gala including band, orchestra, choir, theater arts, dance and flags students. Artwork by Eastlake area students was displayed in the auditorium lobby and culinary arts students served refreshments. Bond 2011 includes \$297.4 million of new construction and improvement district-wide. The voter-approved bond program has added a new elementary and middle combo school, completed Eastlake High School, added three science wings and upgraded and improved 16 existing campuses in SISD. Another elementary school will be built and El Dorado 9th Grade Academy will be converted to Pebble Hills High School in Bond 2011. All projects have been delivered on

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Personality is the name we give to our little collection of funny ways.

— Quips & Quotes

Infrastructure is solution to Vinton's water woes

By Alfredo Vasquez
Special to the Courier

Water systems, that currently provide water to hundreds of homes in the Village of Vinton, tested high for arsenic and showed traces of salt and e-coli, according to a study conducted this summer by health science researchers from the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). The results of the study were presented to the Vinton community during a recent town council meeting.

The study was conducted as a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) and looked at the potential health effects of proposed infrastructure improvements in Vinton.

To conduct the assessment, UTEP received a \$75,000 grant from the Health Impact Project, a collaboration of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts based in Washington, D.C.

In addition to a high presence of arsenic, salts, and E. coli in the water systems, the assessment's data reported that nearly 30 percent of the homes surveyed had never cleaned out their septic tanks and that almost half the homes questioned did not have a certificate of compliance for their septic tanks.

Because of their findings, researchers purported that there is a correlation between Vinton's contaminated water and its higher rate of disease including stomach and abdominal pain, strange cramping, and skin problems like itching and rashes.

"It's very worrisome, very worrisome," Mayor Madeline Praino stated in a recent news report. She said that she herself hasn't been able to drink water from the tap in the 26 years she's lived in the village.

The mayor told reporters that Vinton administration will collaborate with health officials and experts to educate residents on how to protect themselves from the water contaminants, like buying filters and properly maintaining their septic tanks. She said that they will also work with the private providers to improve the quality of the water that is used by Vinton customers.

UTEP's assessment team utilized community-based participatory research methods to draw information and perceptions from community members and leaders in Vinton. The input was gathered through surveys, interviews, focus groups, and public meetings.

The HIA effort was led by the Center

See WATER, Page 3



— Photo by Alfredo Vasquez

BAD H2O — UTEP researchers tested water from well-water systems and reviewed conditions of private septic tanks, as well as coordinated a health survey, for Village of Vinton officials as part of a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) study that was completed this summer. Most Vinton residents currently rely on privately owned water systems, like the one above, and separate septic tanks. The health assessment results were presented to the Vinton community recently, and they add new information regarding the public health impacts of proposed infrastructure improvements.

San Eli HS grad rallies class to help community

By Cynthia P. Marentes
Special to the Courier

Holiday shopping can be a stressful task sometimes especially having to face crowded stores, packed parking lots and droves of shoppers to find the perfect gift. For some San Elizario residents, however, the pressure is not on getting their hands on the latest toy or game console but on paying

a utility bill perhaps or even providing an adequate meal for the family. Samantha Delgadillo, a graduate of San Elizario High School and now a student at UTEP, knows the stories of many of these families facing difficult circumstances during the holiday season and she was determined to do something about it. On December 6, Delgadillo and

See SAN ELI GRAD, Page 4



— Photo courtesy San Elizario ISD

CHECKING IT TWICE — Samantha Delgadillo, left, and Eliana Sanchez review the families on the distribution list.

Veterans Post By Freddy Groves

Is your VA ID card a security risk?

If you have an older ID card issued by the Department of Veterans Affairs, your Social Security number could be at risk for theft.

If your card is pre-2004, your date of birth and Social Security number are right on the front of the card.

Since 2011, the VA hasn't issued ID cards with those two numbers, but that hasn't made the information much safer. Here's why: The information on the barcode on your card can be read by apps easily available online. "App" stands for application, a mini-program that gets installed in a cellphone, like software in a computer. With a phone app scanner held near the card, the Social Security number will pop up.

The VA has known about this since at least 2011, when it issued an online alert. (Were you notified of the risks of the card?) A message on the VA website says, "Some bar code readers, including those available as applications on cellphones, can scan the bar code

on the front of the card and reveal the veteran's Social Security number."

When I looked for phone apps that would read an ID card barcode, I didn't have to go far. I found them everywhere, including brand-name phone app sites. One scanner works up to 20 inches away.

New VA ID cards will be coming out in 2014. Since it's the squeaky wheel that gets the oil, call your local medical center and inquire about getting one of the new cards as soon as they come out.

Your best bet until then: Treat your VA ID card like your Social Security card and leave it at home, not in your wallet, unless you're going for an appointment or need it for some reason.

Freddy Groves regrets that he cannot personally answer reader questions, but will incorporate them into his column whenever possible. Send email to columnreply2@gmail.com. (c) 2013 King Features Synd., Inc.

Finances By Jason Alderman

Who's afraid of the Alternative Minimum Tax?

Year after year, Congress keeps kicking meaningful income tax reform down the road. Consequently, taxpayers continue to be stuck with an archaic, overly complicated mess that pleases no one – except perhaps some tax accountants who charge by the hour.

A prime example is the dreaded alternative minimum tax (AMT). Enacted in 1969 to close loopholes that allowed wealthy taxpayers to avoid paying income taxes, the AMT has been tinkered with so much over the years that millions of middle-income taxpayers now get snared as well.

Historically, the biggest issue has been that while regular tax brackets, exemptions and standard deductions were adjusted annually for inflation, those used to calculate the AMT were not. Some years, Congress approved one-time "patches" to the AMT income exemption amount so fewer people had to pay AMT – usually at the last minute. The Tax Payer Relief Act of 2012 finally made the inflation patch permanent.

Many people never realize they're subject to the AMT until they get a letter from the IRS saying they owe additional tax – plus interest and penalties. So it pays to know how the AMT works:

Each year, taxpayers must determine their AMT status. The IRS' AMT Assistant at www.irs.gov can help you quickly calculate whether you're likely to owe AMT. If you're a likely candidate, you must fill out IRS Form 6251 along with your regular tax form. In a nutshell, the difference between your regular tax calculation and the AMT amount gets added to your return as additional tax.

Lower-income taxpayers typically escape having to pay AMT, but middle-income people with larger-than-average deductions or certain other tax circumstances sometimes fall prey. Here's why:

Under the regular tax calculation, you subtract allowable credits and deductions from your gross income to determine the amount of tax owed. When calculating the AMT, however, many usual deductions and exemptions are adjusted downward or completely

disallowed, resulting in a higher taxable income.

Deductions that aren't allowed in the AMT calculation include:

- Personal exemptions for yourself, spouse and dependents;
 - The standard deduction (claimed by those who don't itemize deductions);
 - State and local income, sales and property taxes; and
 - Miscellaneous itemized deductions.
- Interest on second mortgages; however, primary mortgage interest can be deducted.

(Note: The medical/dental expense deduction is more limited than under regular income tax.)

Other items that may trigger the AMT include exercising large stock options (unless you sell the stock within the same year) and large, long-term capital gains. Usually no single item triggers the AMT, but the right combination of factors often will – for example, if you pay high state and local taxes, claim numerous personal exemptions for dependents and have unusually large itemized deductions.

Back to Form 6251: You'll be asked to perform a series of calculations to determine your AMT income. From that amount you subtract the AMT exemption. For 2013, the AMT exemption amounts are:

- \$51,900 for single and head of household filers;
- \$80,800 for married couples filing jointly; or
- \$40,400 for married filing separately.

After several additional calculations, you finally arrive at how much, if any, AMT you owe. Many of people hire a tax professional to help. Alternatively, most tax-preparation software will also calculate AMT. Just make sure that if you had an AMT capital loss in a previous year's return that you carry the loss forward for this year's calculation to offset any capital gains subject to AMT – the software may not know to do that if it doesn't have access to previous returns.

Jason Alderman directs Visa's financial education programs.

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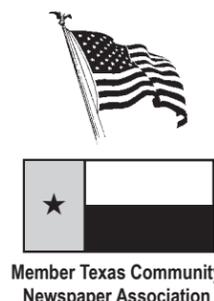
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– Photo courtesy of the El Paso Museum of Archaeology

ONCE UPON A TIME – Alex Mares will discuss Indian uses of native plants during his upcoming presentation. Mares is a member of the Chihuahuan Desert Education Coalition, Serna Ranch Youth Leadership Program, New Mexico State Parks, and the Girl Scouts of the Desert Southwest Council.

Native American stories come to life

By Alfredo Vasquez
Special to the Courier

Fall and winter are storytelling seasons for many Native American tribes and in tribute of this cultural tradition, local storyteller Alex Mares will entertain his audience with Navajo, Pueblo, and Apache myths and legends during El Paso Museum of Archaeology's special

show.

The Native American storytelling program will be from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m., Saturday, December 28, at the archaeology museum (4301 Transmountain Road). The event is free and open to the public.

Mares will share stories from his cultural background which includes Diné, Pueblo, Jicotec and Spanish ancestry. To bring his stories to life, Mares draws upon his experiences

from being raised with Native American relatives and friends in El Paso and from living both north and south of the U.S.-Mexico border.

"Families (with children ages 4 and up) will enjoy this special cultural storytelling event," stated Marilyn Guida, education coordinator for the archaeology museum.

For more information, call 915-755-4332, or send email to guidamr@elpasotexas.gov.



Protect yourself from flu this holiday season

By Brent Annear
Special to the Courier

If you haven't received your flu vaccination yet, it's not too late. Texas physicians say getting vaccinated against the flu is the best way to protect yourself and your family from flu during the holiday season and winter months.

Flu, or influenza, is a highly contagious respiratory virus that is much more severe than a common cold. Even healthy people can get very sick from the flu and spread it to others. Every year about 200,000 people in the nation are hospitalized from flu-related illness.

"Vaccines are one of the safest and most reliable ways to guard yourself and others from infection," said John T. Carlo, MD, MS, chair of Texas Medical Association's Council on Science and Public Health. "When more people get vaccinated, we're all better protected."

An annual flu vaccination is recommended for anyone 6 months of age and older. On average, one out of five Texans gets influenza each year. Influenza can be especially harmful

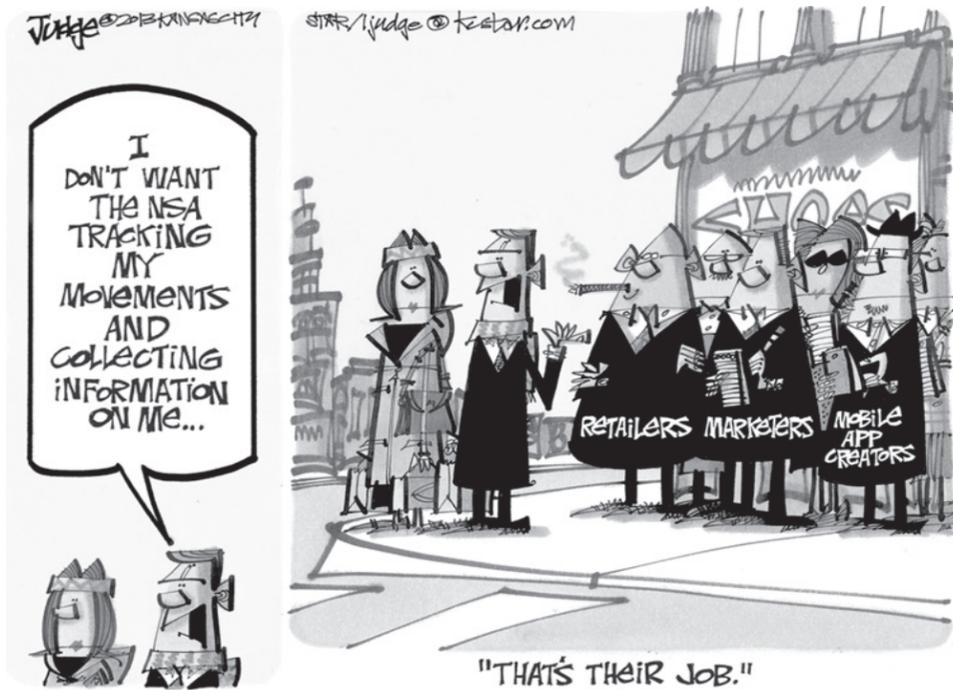
to older people, young children, pregnant women, and people with chronic medical conditions.

"Some people cannot get vaccinated because of certain medical conditions, which make them more vulnerable to catching the flu," said Dr. Carlo. "So it's important for those around them to be vaccinated."

National Influenza Vaccination Week is this week. It's the perfect time to get a flu vaccination to avoid spreading the disease to family and friends during the holidays.

This year, several different types of influenza vaccines are available, including a high-dose vaccine for senior citizens and a non-injection, nasal spray vaccine for healthy people ages 2 through 49 years who are not pregnant. Talk to your doctor about which vaccine is right for you.

Once you get vaccinated, your body works to build immunity, a process that can take up to two weeks. Sometimes you might have a mild reaction to the vaccination, such as a sore arm or achy feeling for a day or two after your vaccination. But whatever discomfort you may feel is minimal compared to the severity of the actual virus.



Water

From Page 1

for Environmental Resource Management (CERM) and the Center for Interdisciplinary Health Research and Evaluation (CIHRE) in the College of Health Sciences at UTEP. Students participated in the field research activities to learn how to conduct HIAs.

In its study, UTEP recommended that the village connect to El Paso Water Utilities for safe water. "Healthy environments contribute to healthy people, and clean water and proper

waste management are fundamental to good public health," CERM Director Dr. Bill Hargrove stated in a recent news report.

"We know what the solution is, the solution is infrastructure, and the wheels are already turning on that," Praino told reporters. Vinton council members approved in November plans for applying for grants to install the infrastructure for new water and sewer systems.

If Vinton is awarded funding for its water projects, the mayor said that it could take up to three to four years for the installation to be complete.



Briefs

From Page 1

time and within budget, keeping true to "Promises Made, Promises Kept."

— Christina Flores-Jones

Aging census lab

The U.S. Census Bureau of the Denver Region and the Rio Grande Council of Governments will present a computer lab on using census data to conduct analysis of the aging populations of Texas and New Mexico. It will be held in El Paso on Wednesday, January 15th, 2014 from 8:30 am to 12:00 pm at the Jenna Welch & Laura Bush Community Library within the EPCC Northwest Campus. This hands-on training immerses participants in Census Bureau data, the most relied-on source for detailed, up-to-date socio-economic statistics covering every community in Texas and New Mexico. Who should come? The lab is for planners, grant writers, administrators, researchers, health care professionals, advocates and others who need data on the aging population and information by specific age groups. Any local government and non-profit agency staff who need to understand the changing demographics of their community's older citizens. For more information, please contact Raul Gonzalez, Regional Services Planner for the Rio Grande Council of Governments at raulg@riocog.org or call (915) 533-0998 ext. 137. Please feel free to pass this information along to any interested parties.

— Raul Gonzalez

Court closed

Justice of the peace PCT 6-1 located at 190 N. San Elizario, Clint, TX will be closed for the Christmas Holidays from December 27, 2013 to January 3, 2014. We will resume normal business hours on

January 6, 2014. Any citations due during that time will be accepted through January 31, 2014. Wishing everyone a Safe and Happy Holiday Season!

— Judge Ruben Lujan

Wanted

A man robs an Anthony Texas store at gunpoint and orders everyone to the floor. The suspect was captured on surveillance video, and the Anthony Police Department is asking for the public's assistance in identifying him through the Crime Stoppers "Crime of the Week." On the night of Saturday, Nov. 30, 2013 just minutes before eight, a man walked into the Family Dollar store located at 517 S. Main in Anthony TX. Once inside, the man pulled out a handgun and ordered the employee and customers to the floor. The suspect approached the store clerk and threatened her and demanded money from the store. The suspect managed to flee the scene with an undisclosed amount of cash. The suspect is described as an Hispanic male in his late 20s wearing a dark colored hood jacket or sweatshirt with a logo of Ecco Unlimited on the front and a solid light colored stripe down the sleeve of each arm, dark colored pants, light colored gloves, and light colored tennis shoes. The suspect was also using light colored bandana to cover his face. The suspect is believed to have fled the scene on foot. Anyone with any information on the identity of the man involved in this robbery is asked to call Crime Stoppers of El Paso immediately at 566-8477 (TIPS), online at www.crimestoppersofelpaso.org or you can send a text message by entering the key word "CRIME1" (no space and include the quotation marks) plus your tip information, and text it to CRIMES (274637). You will remain anonymous and, if your tip leads to an arrest, you can qualify for a cash reward.

— Javier Sambrano





– Photo courtesy San Elizario ISD

THE GANG – Victor Garcia, Jacqueline Armijo, Paul Muela, Vanessa Sandoval, Sharon Murrillo, Samantha Delgado, and Eliana Sanchez.

San Eli grad

From Page 1

some of her fellow UTEP students delivered a large donation of food, blankets, clothing and toiletries for about 40 families in the San Elizario Independent School District.

“It feels amazing to know that I was able to help because I came from here (San Elizario),” Delgado said.

Dozens of boxes were dropped off at the San Elizario ISD administration building and will be distributed to families throughout the district identified by school counselors and social workers. The families are all low income or migrant with children who are students in San Elizario ISD schools.

The idea for the donation came about because the students who are all in a small group communications class at UTEP were required to complete a project for the semester. They could do just about anything

for their project that involved communication but when Delgado started researching possibilities she suggested that the group take on a fundraising and donation drive to help economically disadvantaged families in the community. The San Elizario HS alumna knew that she could put a face to their donations by finding out a little bit more about the families and what resources they were lacking.

Every Christmas her mother Margie and co-workers in the San Elizario Independent School District “adopted” families by providing warm clothes and toys for the children. She fondly recalled helping her mom shop for the families armed with a shopping list, the two checking off gifts and clothing items. Above all, she remembers how gratifying it felt to know that they were helping to make the holidays a little brighter for someone else.

See SAN ELI GRAD, Page 5

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Canutillo students, staff clean up Westway

By **Gustavo Reveles Acosta**
Special to the Courier

CANUTILLO – Students, teachers and staff members from the Canutillo Independent School District joined the members of the Westway Neighborhood Association in a massive effort to clean up the area surrounding Davenport Elementary School this weekend.

Dozens of people braved the cold weather on Saturday morning to help pick up trash and collect debris around the school and the neighborhood. The trash – including tires and wooden pallets – was hauled away in an effort to make Westway a cleaner and more beautiful community in which to live.

The effort was spearheaded by the Westway Neighborhood Association and received the support of students from Davenport, administrations from throughout CISD and members of the Canutillo Bond Oversight Committee, or CBAC.

“The Westway community has embraced Davenport Elementary from the moment the school opened, and this clean up effort is another sign of this wonderful relationship that we have developed,” said Davenport Principal Marta Strobach. “It’s heart warming to see that so many people – including many from outside the Westway neighborhood – came out to support our efforts to provide our students with a clean and safe environment.”

The clean up yielded dozens of plastic bags filled with trash. Larger debris was hauled to official landfills.

CISD Superintendent Dr. Pedro Galaviz, along with his family, helped in the clean up effort and deemed it a wonderful learning opportunity for any student in the District.

“There’s a definite lesson in ecology here for our students, who learned how pollution impacts the environment,” he said. “But perhaps the most important lesson was in civics. Our students saw first hand what communities can do when they come together for a greater good.”



– Photo courtesy San Elizario ISD

WE DELIVER – Jacqueline Armijo unloads boxes in front of the San Elizario ISD Administration Building.

San Eli grad

From Page 4

I wanted to rip my hair out. The only thing that kept me working and pushing everybody was knowing that these families were getting help that they wouldn’t get otherwise,”

“There were so many times that

Delgadillo added. In turn, she continued, the UTEP students would know exactly who was receiving their donation.

Since October, the communications class of about 30 students divided into groups to collect donations, set up fundraisers and partner with other organizations to obtain all the items requested by their assigned family. According to Delgadillo, in the past other students in the class taught by Dr. Martina H Myers, had done donation drives and fundraisers as part of their group project but never to the extent that her group was able to accomplish.

“We do have remarkable students in our Communication Department and across our community. With all of their concerns to finish their finals they still make time to act on behalf of others.” Beto López, UTEP Assistant Vice President for Institutional Advancement, stated.

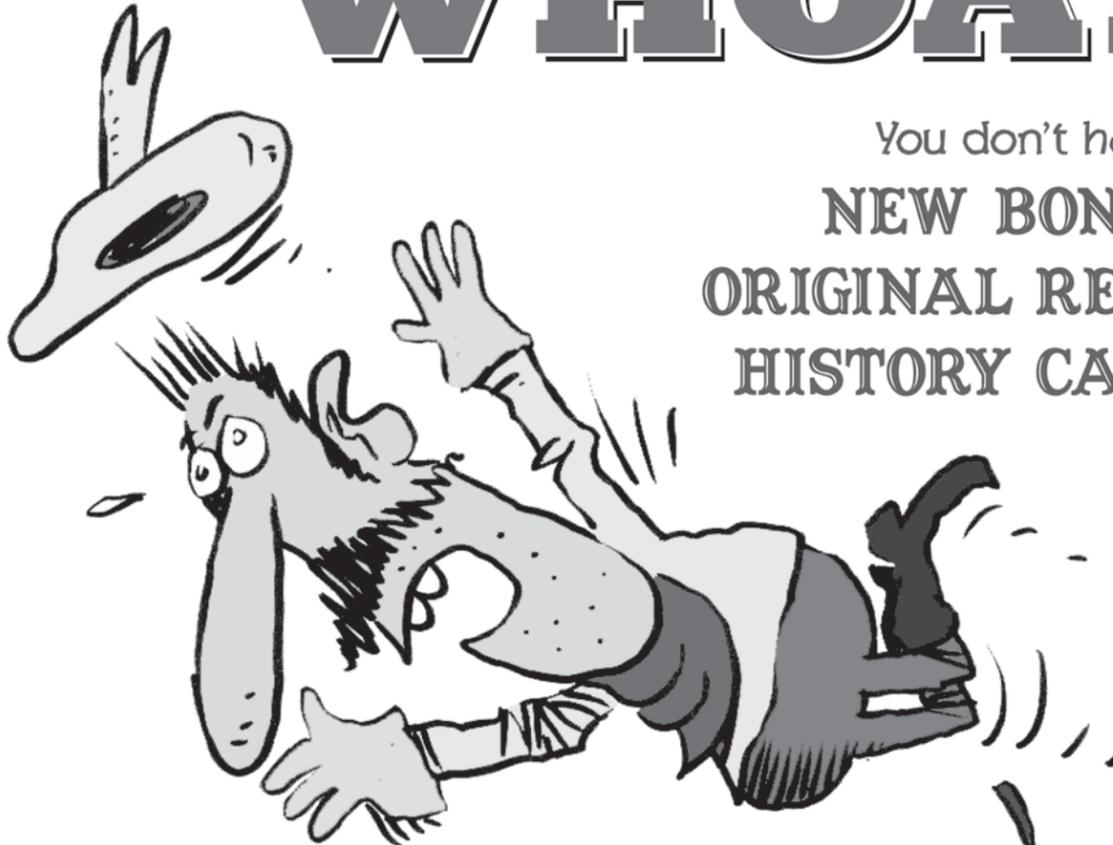
Delgadillo is relieved to know

that they successfully finished their class project not just in order to receive a final grade but because they had done something good for people that were most in need. She added that her class as whole wanted to thank their professor Dr. Myers for facilitating and giving them free reign on the project including everyone at UTEP who helped with donations, storage, packing and distributing all of the donations.

The donations were delivered by the students in several cars and one truck loaded with boxes that filled a good portion of the San Elizario ISD boardroom. Families from Sambrano Elementary School, San Elizario High School, and the migrant program will receive the majority of the donations with any remaining items going to the San Elizario Food Bank over the course of the next several days just in time for the holidays.



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Miners show signs of life heading to conference play

By Steve Escajeda
Special to the Courier

A few months ago it appeared as if the UTEP Miners basketball team was headed toward something special.

The kind of special that hasn't been experienced here since 1992 when the Miners knocked off second-ranked Kansas to advance to the Sweet 16 round of the NCAA Tournament.

But then before things even got started, all kinds of future stars left the program for reasons ranging from failing to take the classroom seriously to wanting to stay closer to Grandma.

Whatever the reason, the stars that were going to propel the Miners to the upper echelon of college basketball in a couple years are gone and the team has to make due with what it has.

And though the team doesn't have the depth or talent it could have had, it showed at last week's Bahamas Tournament that it will have a say in who takes this year's Conference USA title.

The surprising victory over Tennessee and the narrow four-point loss to second-ranked (at the time) Kansas proved that the Miners can compete with anyone in the nation.

Of course those two well-played games came sandwiched around a 36-point drilling at the hands of Iowa. But the Miners can still feel better about themselves after falling twice to New Mexico State already this season.

UTEP's biggest problem over the rest of the year is going to be its guard play and the ability to hold its opponents to just one shot at a time.

Without a true point guard, the Miners have a big problem getting the ball near the net and then dishing it off to one of their big guys for an easy basket around the rim.

Without the ability to penetrate, the Miners, who are not a good shooting team, must settle for outside shots that have a less than 50-percent chance of finding the bottom of the net.

The disappointing play of C.J. Cooper and Jalen Ragland hasn't helped the team a bit. Both were going to have to step it up in the wake of the defections.

The one player that has emerged as the point guard is transfer Justin Crosigile, who has enough on his plate just learning how his new coach Tim Floyd wants things done, let alone lead a team.

Another problem the Miners have are the big guys.

Don't get me wrong, UTEP's got plenty of them. They've got 6-11 John Bohannon and 6-10 Cedrick Lang and 6-11 Hooper Vint and 7-1 Matt Willms.

Only thing is they've been playing like a bunch of 6-5 guys.

The Miner big dudes have a propensity for letting other big guys in front of them under the basket and they also have developed a knack for tipping the ball up in the air instead of grabbing it.

Though they've outrebounded some of their opponents, the Miners have been embarrassed under the basket by the tune of 37-23 to NMSU, 46-40 to Western Alabama, 46-28 to Tennessee and 46-24 to Iowa.

They say that rebounding is all about want to. It appears that the Miner big guys want to; it may be just a matter of being able to.

The Miners are at the beginning of a long

string of home games and that could be just what the doctor ordered for a team that is probably where it should be after its first eight games, 4-4.

The Miners start league play in a month and that should give Floyd enough time to teach his team how to get by with limited guard play.

Of course knowing Floyd, it all starts with defense and like Don Haskins before him, he will take a not-as-talented team and make them conference contenders because of their defensive play.

But before that can happen, the big guys are going to have to develop a mean streak with the attitude that every ball coming off the rim is rightfully theirs.

The three Bahamas games against Tennessee, Iowa and Kansas, along with the coaching staff's rather tumultuous conversation with the USC coaches, should give the team confidence going into the rest of the season.

So don't be surprised if UTEP goes into the conference tournament (in El Paso) on a roll.

The Miners have won in the past with much less.

A sporting view By Mark Vasto

What would Phil Sims do?

If you're lucky enough to have one, let's all admit this: It really is so nice to be home for the holidays.

I grew up a Roman Catholic, and my family religiously attended the 12:30 mass on Sundays – no pun intended. This was a time when people still wore their "Sunday best" and made a bit of a show of it in church. It literally did become a sport for some people.

"Oh look... here come the

Johnsons in that conversion van. What do you think they do in there? I heard those limousine antennas get really poor reception anyway."

"The Fosters never dress up. And they're always late."

"Here comes the diva singer, needy for attention."

"The altar boy has no clue as to what he is doing."

The altar boy in question was me. But I wasn't being disrespectful up

there on stage, I was just thinking about other things.

Typically, my deity of choice would be the New York Giants. In between furtive glances at the Johnson sisters, I would sometimes make eye contact with my buddies out in the pews. We weren't thinking about the day's reading, and if we were thinking about what Jesus would do, we wondered what he would do on a third and long on the Giants' own 40 against a plucky Minnesota Viking team. "What would Phil Simms do?" was more along the lines of our thinking.

After the mass, we would all

congregate at the Johnson's suddenly cool conversion van.

"Giants 27, Vikings 17," Mr. Johnson would say. We would look at our watches and gauge the time. We all lived within 10 minutes of our homes, so we could catch the last quarter if we didn't have to pick anything up before company arrived at 2 p.m. It wasn't like we could watch the game in the van... the TV reception really was pretty bad.

By the time the holidays rolled around, the hosting family had it down to a science. They had learned to have everything in the house as to avoid the last-minute game-delaying shopping trip, and they never begrudged us the end of the game during appetizers.

Besides... we had an ace up our sleeves: In the New York market, we got the 4 p.m. Jets game, too.

"But I thought you were a Giants

fan?"

"Om, yeah... but we like the Jets now, too."

Hey, we needed a break from the table. In a way it was a compliment... it was like we were conceding defeat. We simply couldn't eat anymore. In any event, much like Dan Marino's inevitable game-winning touchdown before dessert, it was tradition.

"Oh, the Jets lost? That's a shame." "Speaking of shame... did you see what the Fosters were wearing at church today?"

Today, even if the traditions have changed... it's nice to remember. Here's hoping the Johnson's have better reception and the Fosters have nicer clothes, and here's hoping all of your holidays are bright, too.

Mark Vasto is a veteran sportswriter who lives in Kansas City. (c) 2013 King Features Synd., Inc.

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Moore Texas by Roger Moore **Coffee carried on Texas cattle drives sometimes had a peppermint stick in the package, leading to fistfights.**



Social Security Q&A By Ray Vigil
Create a better financial plan in 2014

Another New Year is just around the corner, offering a new opportunity to improve your life in any number of ways with a wise New Year's resolution or two. (No doubt, for most of us the possibilities are endless.) But one good idea for many might be creating (or updating) a long-term financial plan.

According to a 2013 survey by the Employee Benefit Research Institute, "the percentage of workers confident about having enough money for a comfortable retirement is essentially unchanged from the record lows observed in 2011." Only 13 percent are very confident of being able to afford a comfortable retirement, while 28 percent are not at all confident.

If you are among those with lower financial confidence and you haven't started to save for retirement already, now is the time to begin — no matter what your age. If retirement is near, you'll want to jump into the fast lane right away. If you're younger and retirement seems a lifetime away, it's still in your best interest to begin saving now, as compound interest will work to your advantage. Experts agree that saving when you're young will make a world of difference when the time comes to draw on your retirement savings.

Don't take our word for it. You can check out the numbers yourself.

A great place to start figuring out how much you will need for retirement is to learn how much you could expect from Social Security. You can do that in minutes with Social Security's online *Retirement Estimator*.

The *Retirement Estimator* offers an instant and personalized estimate of your future Social Security retirement benefits based on your earnings record. Try it out at www.socialsecurity.gov/estimator.

We encourage saving for retirement, but there are reasons to save for every stage of life. A great place to go for help is www.mymoney.gov. MyMoney.gov is the government's website dedicated to teaching Americans the basics about financial education. Whether you are planning to buy a home, balancing your checkbook, or investing in your 401(k) plan, the resources on www.mymoney.gov can help you.

Another excellent resource is the *Ballpark E\$timator* at www.choosetosave.org/ballpark. This online tool takes complicated issues, like projected Social Security benefits and earnings assumptions on savings, and turns them into language and numbers that are easy to understand.

So turn over a new financial page in your life with the start of a new year, and get started at www.socialsecurity.gov.

STRANGE BUT TRUE
By Samantha Weaver

- It was industrialist Andrew Carnegie, who was born into a poor Scottish family and emigrated to the U.S. as a teen, who made the following sage observation: "There is not such a cradle of democracy upon the earth as the Free Public Library, this republic of letters, where neither rank, office, nor wealth receives the slightest consideration."

- There are 10 times more cells from microorganisms like bacteria and fungi in and on our bodies than there are human cells.

- If you're like 66 percent of American adults, you'd bend over to pick up a penny you found in the street. Nearly three-quarters of adults would pick up a nickel.

- You might be surprised to learn that drinking tea increased the life expectancy of the British — and even more surprised to learn why. It wasn't any beneficial compound found in the tea itself; rather, it was the act of boiling the water, which had the effect of killing pathogens found in the untreated water that was largely in use in England at that time. Also, once the Brits started drinking tea, they became addicted to the caffeine and therefore drank quite a bit more boiled water than had been their wont, decreasing even further their exposure to the pathogens that caused illness.

- The United States Department of Commerce has designated approximately 30 houses across the country as authentic haunted houses.

- Astronauts grew roses in space just to find out if a rose grown in microgravity would smell as sweet. The researchers found that it did, indeed, smell as sweet, but the smell was different from that of the same variety of rose grown the old-fashioned way.

Thought for the Day: "The most exciting phrase to hear in science, the one that heralds new discoveries, is not 'Eureka!' but 'That's funny...'"

— Isaac Asimov

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GO FIGURE! by Linda Thistle

The idea of Go Figure is to arrive at the figures given at the bottom and right-hand columns of the diagram by following the arithmetic signs in the order they are given (that is, from left to right and top to bottom). Use only the numbers below the diagram to complete its blank squares and use each of the nine numbers only once.

	-		x		30
x		x		÷	
	x		-		29
-		+		+	
	x		-		36
19		21		11	

DIFFICULTY: ★★

★ Moderate ★★ Difficult
★★★ GO FIGURE!

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 9

Answer Page 4

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Weekly SUDOKU

by Linda Thistle

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

Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ★★★

★ Moderate ★★ Challenging

Answer Page 5

★★★ HOO BOY!

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CryptoQuip

This is a simple substitution cipher in which each letter used stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Solution is accomplished by trial and error.

Clue: U equals M

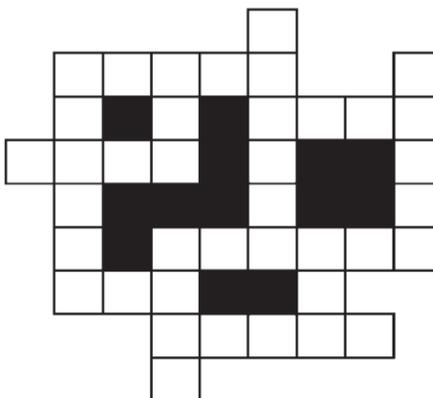
UX GZCDIT SVLDT UD KY JYYL
SK S AYYVD GSZU VYUDEYTX
OST KYJT OCU SEYQK, VY C
KYYL S ASITDZ.

Answer Page 4

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- OWW
- ♥ WYNAUR
- AFIMA
- ♥ ASMW
- SNAFET
- ♥ EAY
- YIWL
- WOFNR
- AFY
- LYMINA
- ♥ LYMPA
- ♥ FTRA



Answer Page 4

Unscramble these twelve letter strings to form each into an ordinary word (ex. HAGNEC becomes CHANGE). Prepare to use only ONE word from any marked (♥) letter string as each unscrambles into more than one word (ex. ♥RATHE becomes HATER or EARTH or HEART). Fit each string's word either across or down to knot all twelve strings together.

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