



NEWSBRIEFS

Credit scores

With a good credit score being essential for getting approved for loans and lines of credit, as well as securing low interest rates and high credit limits, the personal-finance website WalletHub has released its report on the *Cities with the Highest & Lowest Credit Scores in 2024*, as well as expert commentary. WalletHub's report aimed to find out where Americans demonstrate the most responsible behavior, and it ranked the cities using WalletHub's proprietary data on residents' credit scores. El Paso ranked 140th with an average credit score of 651 in the report.

"Having a good or excellent credit score opens up so many doors for you. Not only does it help you get approved for future loans and lines of credit, but it also reduces your interest rate and increases the amount you're able to borrow. A good credit score can even make you a stronger candidate for employment, help you with renting housing, and make you a more attractive dating partner. South Burlington, VT residents have the highest average credit score in the country, at 736. That puts them into the excellent credit range. Since South Burlington residents are so financially responsible, it's not surprising that they also have high incomes. The median income is around \$65,700, ranking 29th highest out of the 182 cities in our study."

— Cassandra Happe
WalletHub Analyst

Expert Commentary

What tips do you have for a person trying to increase their credit score quickly?

"It is a step-by-step process that, for many young adults, begins with student loan repayment performance. It is also important to identify the financial services products that actually build credit. For example, debit cards do not, and credit cards do. And for those who may not be able to qualify for a credit card, there is the 'secured credit card' route where the cardholder places on deposit with the card company a set dollar

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Old-timers well remember when a family that could not afford to own a car didn't have one.

— Quips & Quotes



— Photos by Alfredo Vasquez

GATHERING GOODIES – Parents and grandparents helped their toddlers gather colorful plastic Easter eggs during the Village of Vinton's recent Easter egg hunt event.

Eggstravaganza brings Vinton together

By Alfredo Vasquez
Special to the Courier

VINTON – The Village of Vinton's Second Annual Easter Eggstravaganza, held last Saturday, was all about community engagement, stated Vinton Mayor Rachel Quintana. "We wanted our residents and neighbors from the surrounding areas to come here, meet with other families, and participate with their children in the many activities we had to offer," the mayor said.

The morning event brought over 500 individuals together as they perused through the various booths that included arts and crafts displays, healthy living information, public and private service promotional materials, as well as jumping balloons, and more.

The highlight of the Vinton affair, of course, was the Easter egg hunt as toddlers to twelve year olds were given an opportunity to gather the small, plastic colored eggs that had candy in them. Over 3,000 of the colorful plastic eggs were made available for children to find, according to Josh Luna, Vinton's community outreach specialist. Some of the eggs held special tokens that could be exchanged for prizes.

Making the Eggstravaganza



HOLD STILL – Eight year old Eli, above left, lets Eileen Gonzalez, of Smiling Faces, perform a face painting operation on his forehead. There is a small line waiting for a turn.

possible were the Village of Vinton including Novamex, Tri-State staff members with the financial backing of several business sponsors

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Joe Biden's inane war on packaging



Joe Biden has met the enemy, and it is smaller packaging for foodstuffs.

The White House is targeting the practice known as "shrinkflation," or companies keeping the nominal price of a product the same while decreasing the amount. This, naturally, is just another way of charging more. If the price is the same, but you're getting only 14 ounces of Wheat Thins instead of 16, you are paying more for your whole-wheat crackers.

President Biden slammed shrinkflation in a Super Bowl video featuring various offending snacks, including Doritos, Tostitos and Oreos. He called it a "rip off," and declared that "the American public is tired of being played for suckers." He may revisit the theme in his State of the Union address.

This has to rank as one of the most economically

illiterate and juvenile presidential crusades in recent history.

Shrinkflation is a symptom of inflation, not a cause. And to the extent it is fooling anyone about higher prices, it is helping Biden, whose economic record has been blighted by persistently high prices, especially for food.

A company that is raising its prices can either charge more or reduce the size of its product. What Biden is suggesting is that the former is the best option and companies should always increase their sticker prices.

If he were being cogent, Biden should have held up a bag of Doritos in his Super Bowl video and said, "I don't care what Frito Lay says – this bag should be .50 ounces bigger and more expensive

than it is now. How dare corporate America deal with the stubbornly high inflation the last few years by trying to hide from people how they are paying more for food."

Of course, Biden's goal is to shift blame, yet complaining about smaller bags is only another way of complaining about higher prices. He might as well be pointing out that beef now costs an ungodly \$8 a pound, or that the price of baby food has increased nearly 9% over the past 12 months.

According to a report in The Wall Street Journal,

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value, which then becomes the credit limit. As long as the card holder makes the payments, in full or in part, the deposited funds remain untouched and the cardholder's credit profile is then 'built.' If not, the deposit is used to repay the outstanding debt and the personal credit profile suffers."

– Mitchell D. Weiss
Course Author and
Lecturer
Rutgers University

"Prioritize to pay off your debt that has the highest level of interest, most likely credit cards, and if possible, consolidate your debt into a loan that you can solely focus on repaying. Try to avoid the 'new buy now, pay later' offers for purchases. These programs are just another form of

debt. As the debt gets paid off, the credit score should go up."

– Tom Arnold, Ph.D.
Chair in Business
University of Richmond

What is the best way for a young person to build credit?

"Setting up auto-pay is always the priority. Building credit is a long journey. That is the reason why prioritizing and budgeting is essential. Consumers should know the 'non-discretionary' expenses, such as mortgage, utilities, groceries, etc. Creating a budget also helps and improves consumer's ability and responsibility to use credit cards. The more detailed budget has been completed, the better picture that consumers can have. Consumers can precisely track their historical usage to notice if they spend too much money on something

unimportant, such as auto-renew membership, etc. Checking and verifying each transaction regularly is also helpful. Avoid mental accounting: Some consumers may consider applying for new credit cards to cover their overspending behavior or overcoming tough times. Monitoring credit cards regularly and responsibly is extremely important for both young and older people. If young people maintain their budget behavior, having high and stable credit scores for a lifetime would be much easier."

– Di Qing, Ph.D.
CFP Program Coordinator
Auburn University

"Open a credit card account: Apply for a credit card, preferably one designed for individuals with limited credit history or a secured credit card. Use it responsibly by making small purchases and paying off the balance in full each month to avoid interest charges... Pay bills on time: Timely payment of bills, such as rent, utilities, and student loans, can also contribute to building a positive credit history. While these payments may not initially

appear on your credit report, some credit scoring models consider alternative data, like rent payments, in their calculations. Keep credit utilization low: Try to keep your credit card balances low relative to your credit limit. Ideally, aim to use no more than 30% of your available credit at any given time. Monitor your credit report: Regularly review your credit report to ensure that all information is accurate."

– Andrew Burnstine, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Lynn University

What are some strategies for people who are facing financial difficulties to protect their credit scores?

"Do not accrue more debt, consolidate your existing debt at a reasonable rate of interest, and pay down that debt. Generally, this is really a matter of controlling spending rather than a lack of desire to pay down debt. In fact, if you control your spending and even better, reduce your spending, paying down debt and savings are the by-products of these actions."

– Tom Arnold, Ph.D.
Visit <https://wallethub.com/edu/credit-score-by-city/86509> for the full

report.

– Diana Polk

Resignations

With 54,000 fewer Americans having quit their jobs during the latest month for which data is available (January) compared to the previous month, WalletHub has released its updated report on 2024's States With the Highest Job Resignation Rates, along with expert commentary. WalletHub ranked the 50 states and the District of Columbia based on how frequently people are leaving their places of employment. Below, you can see highlights from the report. Texas ranked 17th in the report, rating:

- Resignation rate during the latest month: 2.40%; and
- Resignation rate in the past 12 months: 2.73%.

Expert Commentary

Will this be a long-term issue or will we see a re-entering in the labor force of prime-age workers in 2024?

"Believing ample labor is sitting on the sidelines is a dangerous proposition for

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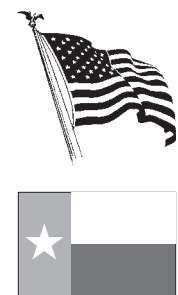
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View from here By Dr. Glenn Mollette

Congress must prove they can succeed

Life is fragile and doesn't last very long, so we should try to enjoy every day.

Be good to yourself and be good to other people. Treat people the way you would like to be treated. Speak to people in a manner that you would like for them to speak to you. Treat motorists on the highway the way you want others to treat you.

If you can help someone in some way, then don't miss the opportunity of being blessed by doing an act of kindness.

Forgive yourself and forgive others. Extend grace and move forward with life. Some things are hard to overcome but carefully consider what you want to carry around the rest of your life. If someone broke in front of you at the cafeteria line then don't hold that against them the rest of your life. It harms you more than it harms them. Some much of the baggage that we carry all our lives is not worth the burden and unrest that it causes. Let it go and move forward.

Try to do what you enjoy every day or at least some of the time. There are always dishes to wash, grass to mow and bills to pay. Life is filled with the daily chores and tasks of life. Try to fit into your schedule what brings you some pleasure. It may be the simplest of activities but that's okay. A car drive, a walk around the block, fishing or sitting in church, whatever it is then find time for the simple pleasures of life.

Life is fragile. We are all one heartbeat away from death. We never know what's lurking inside these bodies that could disable or kill us at any moment. Routine physical exams are vital

to try to maintain our health but even then, they are not the silver bullet. Anything can happen at any time. Take value in this day that you have and soak in the sunshine or the rain, whatever is going on, find joy in another day of life.

Do not fall out with people over politics and issues. It's important to be able to express our points of view and work to accomplish change. However, the only way we are going to bring about change and progress is by working together. A divided house cannot stand, nor can a divided nation The planet needs for America to be "United."

United doesn't necessarily mean in harmony. I heard a story about a little boy who tied the tails of two tomcats together and hung them on a clothesline. They were very united but they had no harmony. Obviously, this would be a bad thing to do but it's sort of like our United States Congress. They are all united by political positions and have to show up in the same room but they argue, fight and scratch every day without bring about solutions. Each of us must demand from our local Congressional representation that they go to D.C. to work beyond party lines, embrace each other, and get things accomplished.

Those who serve us in D.C. must demonstrate to the American people what it takes to get things done instead of what it takes to fail.

Find books by Glenn Mollette at Amazon.com Learn more about his books, columns and music at GlennMollette.com

Fabens Independent School District PUBLIC NOTICE

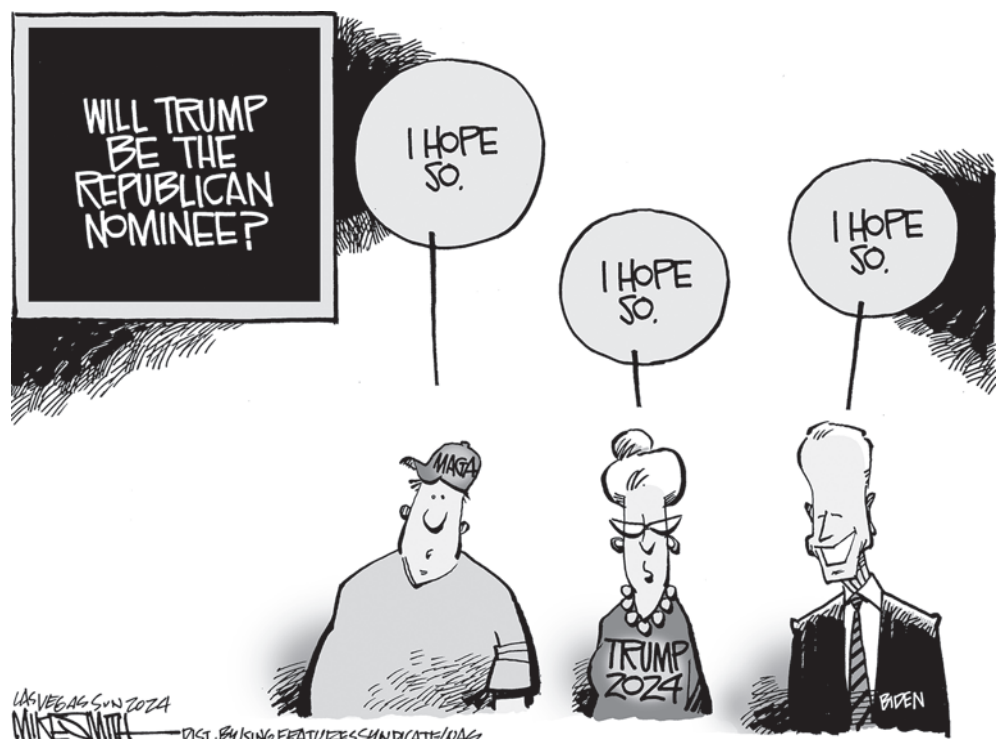
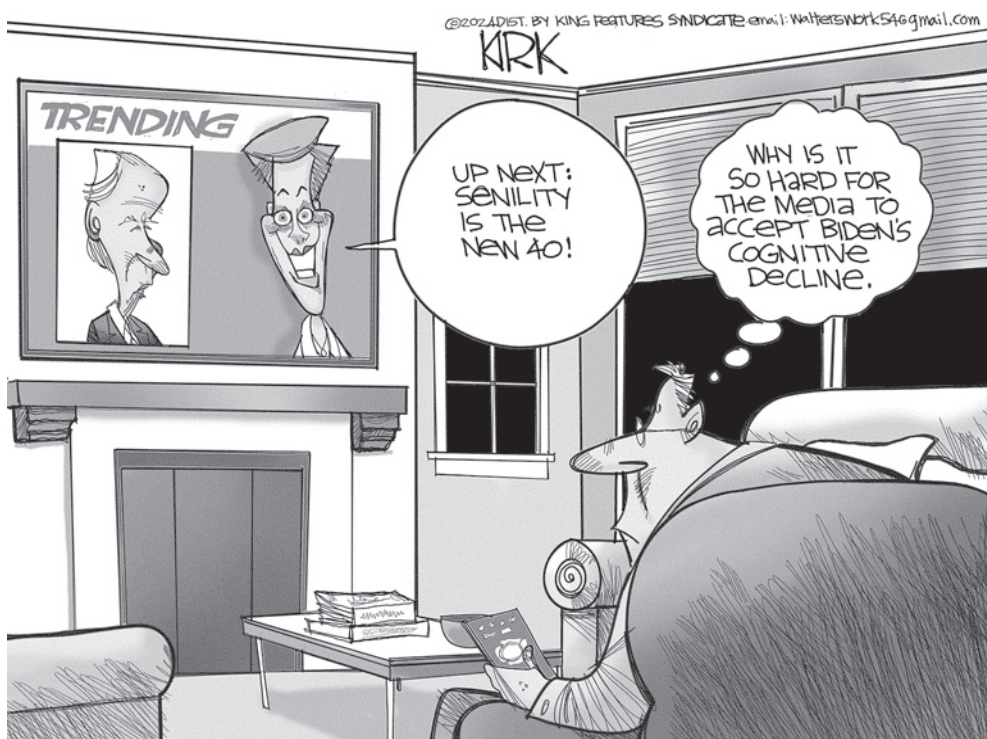
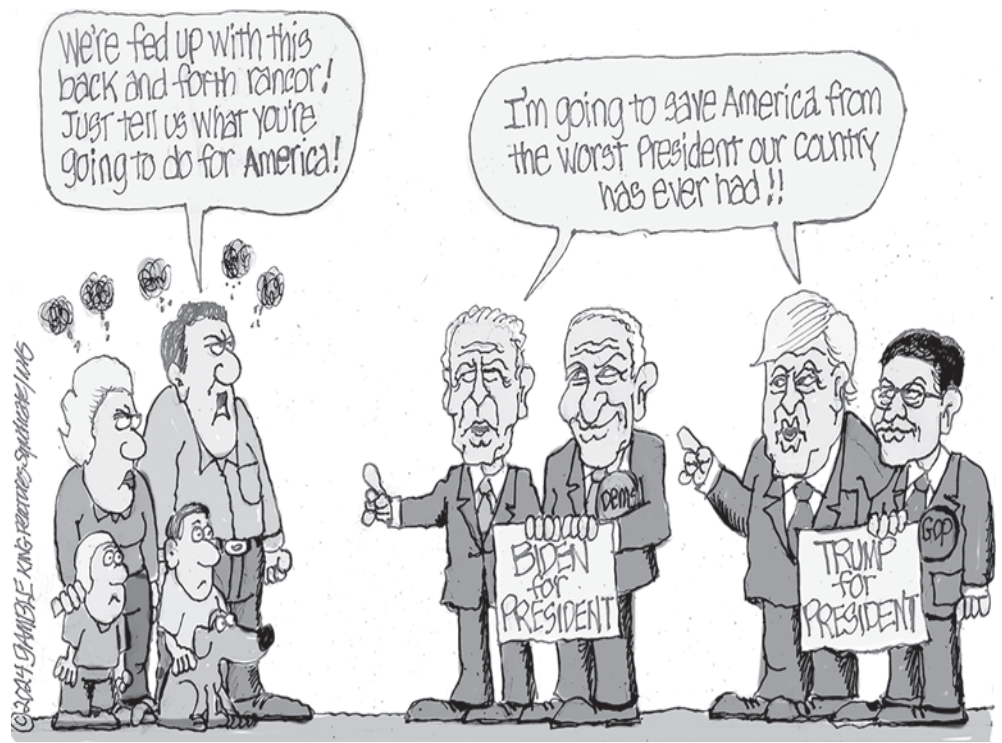
The Fabens Independent School District Special Education Department will be destroying confidential student information on special education students who have graduated, moved or were dismissed in 2017. Parents of these students may come to the Special Education Department located at 603 NE Camp Street. in Fabens on Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. to claim their child's file. The remaining files will be destroyed as per state directives 30 days from the date of this notice. If you have an questions, please call (915) 765-2690.

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El Departamento de Educación Especial del Distrito Escolar de Fabens va a destruir los archivos confidenciales de estudiantes que estaban en el programa de educación especial que han graduado, se han movido, o fueron despedidos en el año escolar de 2017. Los padres de estos estudiantes pueden venir a la oficina del Departamento de Educacion Especial del Distrito Escolar de Fabens en 603 NE Camp Street, de lunes a viernes de 8:00-4:30 de la tarde a recoger los archivos de sus hijos. Los archivos que no sean recogidos van a ser destruidos como manda el estado en 30 días después de este aviso. Si tienen preguntas, llamen al teléfono (915) 765-2690.

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employers. Instead, firms should work aggressively to reallocate internal resources, increase labor attraction and retention efforts, and, most importantly, increase labor productivity. When there are limited resources, and at this stage in the economic cycle, there is a limited resource called labor, firms need to be rational and identify the most and least profitable lines. Reallocating labor to more profitable portions of the business will help the firm remain competitive and capture market share while the economy is strong. Although human resource departments have likely made multiple changes to wages, benefits, and corporate culture, those changes are not likely enough in most cases. Firms must remember that the power dynamic of having excessive labor for a few positions, which has been the case for more than two decades, is not where the market is today. Corporate profits are at record highs, which indicates that there

remains room to provide more incentives to workers. The most crucial competitive factor firms must focus on in 2024 is developing a plan to increase labor productivity. Given that the labor market is at or near full employment, those companies that can increase the output per existing worker will gain a larger market share and profit over their competitors.”

– *Jeremy Hill*
 Director, Center for Economic Development and Business Research
 Wichita State University

“Asking whether these trends would reverse in a particular year is futile; these are decadal phenomena; my sense is that these trends will stabilize, but not revert; we have already reached peak remote work, at least for the near future, and that is the only driving force I see out there.”

– *Giuseppe Moscarini*
 Professor
 Yale University

Has remote working determined, in any way, this change in the labor force?

“If anything, it reduced it because working from home

is easier for most people, and if you have a remote job, it is not so easy to get another, so you do not quit.”

– *Peter Cappelli*
 Director, Center for Human Resources
 The Wharton School
 University of Pennsylvania

“Remote work should raise participation rates, by making it easier to reconcile work with child care, high housing costs, and dual-earner job search; the fact that participation rates are no longer falling, especially for women, after the pandemic, may be indeed related to remote work arrangements; but let us not forget that remote work was already expanding, on a much smaller scale, in the last two decades.”

– *Giuseppe Moscarini*
 Visit <https://wallethub.com/edu/states-with-highest-job-resignation-rates/101077> for the full report.

– *Diana Polk*

Mortgages

Americans owe more than \$12 trillion on their mortgages, and the personal-finance website WalletHub has released its report on the States Adding the Most Mortgage Debt to show where homeowners are struggling the most. WalletHub compared the 50 states based on its proprietary data on mortgage debt from Q3 2023 to Q4 2023. Texas added the 4th most debt in the report. Other stats:

- Change in average mortgage debt: The average mortgage balance in Texas increased by 0.59% from Q3 2023 to Q4 2023.
- Average mortgage debt: The average mortgage

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CryptoQuip Answer

Those amenities that make a pastor’s life more pleasant, I like to call them preacher comforts.



By Lucie Winborne

- In a process called rice-fish culture, Indonesian farmers introduce fish into their rice fields so the fish droppings will act as fertilizer. In turn, the fish also eat harmful insects and improve oxygen circulation, increasing crop yields by up to 10%.

- The people who falsely claimed the copyright to the “Happy Birthday to You” song made \$2 million a year for decades, until the song was ruled to be in the public domain.

- A man who had received the transplanted heart of a suicide victim married the donor’s widow and took his own life in the exact same way as the donor did.

- After two thieves in England broke into a man’s house and made off with his laptop, they found child abuse material on the device and took it to the police. The pedophile received a sentence of three years in prison, while the thieves were given 12 months of community service in light of their “good deed.”

- During his presidency, John F. Kennedy refused to take his salary of \$150,000 per year, instead donating the entire amount to charity.

- Hundreds of people die each year from shoveling snow.

- Who says cats don’t care? After one feline owner survived a series of strokes, he tried to train the animal to dial 911. While he wasn’t sure at first that the attempt would pay off, after he fell from his wheelchair following a seizure, police received a silent emergency call from his home and arrived to find him incapacitated and his cat next to the phone.

- Loneliness poses a greater risk to one’s health than obesity.

Thought for the Day: “He who has a why to live can bear almost any how.”
 – Friedrich Nietzsche

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Moments in time
 THE HISTORY CHANNEL

- On March 25, 2017, the world’s largest banana split made its debut in Innisfail, Australia. Concocted with 40,000 bananas, it stretched for an astounding 5 miles long. No word on the number of calories it contained.

- On March 26, 1971, East Pakistan declared its independence from Pakistan, forming Bangladesh, which started an eight-month-long war between Pakistan and the newly-formed state. As many as 3 million people lost their lives in the conflict.

- On March 27, 1989, the groundbreaking soap opera “Generations” aired on NBC-TV, making it the first U.S. African-American show of its kind. Focusing on the relationship between two Chicago families, one white and one Black, the series tackled difficult subjects, including sickle cell anemia, racial bias and hate crimes, but failed to find a wide audience and was canceled in 1991.

- On March 28, 1949, English astronomer Fred Hoyle coined the term “Big Bang” during a BBC radio interview, though he also refuted the scientific theory, remarking in a later interview with the network that “the reason why scientists like the ‘big bang’ is because they are overshadowed by the Book of Genesis. It is deep within the psyche of most scientists to believe in the first page of Genesis.”

- On March 29, 1984, the city of Baltimore refused to replace its antiquated stadium, so the owner of the Baltimore Colts decided to up and leave the state. The team loaded up all their equipment into 15 trucks, moved to Indiana, and renamed themselves the Indianapolis Colts.

- On March 30, 1842, inhaled sulfuric ether was used as an anesthetic for the first time, by American surgeon Crawford Williamson Long, the first obstetric anesthetist, in Athens, GA. Long was also a cousin of Western legend Doc Holliday, and may have operated on Doc’s cleft lip.

- On March 31, 1923, the first dance marathon took place in New York City, with dance instructor Alma Cummings setting a new record at the Audubon Ballroom by hoofing it for 27 hours with six different partners. In just three weeks, her feat would be surpassed at least nine times across the U.S.

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— Photos by Alfredo Vasquez

A BIG SUCCESS – More than 50 booths and food trucks were set up at the Village’s community park last Saturday morning to provide a variety of offerings for the hundreds of Vinton Easter extravaganza attendees.

Vinton

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Electric, Scott Plumbing,

JR Construction, El Paso Disposal, and El Paso Health Manufacturing.

“We want to make this event an annual tradition

for families of the Village of Vinton and surrounding communities. We hope to provide more activities that

parents can participate in

with their children,” said the Vinton mayor as she walked the festive grounds on that cool, cloudy Saturday morning.

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balance in Texas was \$247,104 in Q4 2023.

• Average monthly payment: The average monthly mortgage payment in Texas was \$2,026 in Q4 2023.

“Mortgage interest rates are the highest they’ve been in around a decade, and home prices have seen a meteoric rise in recent years as well. Even small increases in home prices can lead to thousands of dollars in extra mortgage interest costs for homeowners, so it’s important to choose wisely when deciding where and when to buy a house. Maryland residents added the most mortgage debt from Q3 2023 to Q4 2023, at least in percentage terms, with the average balance rising by 1.23% to \$283,092. No other state had an increase above 1%, and 17 states even saw decreases during Q4.”

— John Kiernan, WalletHub Editor

Visit <https://wallethub.com/edu/states-adding-the-most-mortgage-debt/132824> for the full report.

— Diana Polk



STEP RIGHT UP – Lynda Arrufat, above right, set up her table with books and magazines that were distributed during the Vinton Easter event. Arrufat has been helping with the free reading materials distribution for the past four years as part of Canutillo ISD’s Student Support Services programs.

The Walden era at UTEP officially begins

By Steve Escajeda
Special to the Courier

As far back as I can remember, El Paso sports fans would utter the same words every year, "I can't wait for basketball season to start."

They would usually say that in the middle of football season, as the Miners would suffer through another disappointing season.

But in 2024, things have changed a bit.

Now, fans all over the Sun City have been heard saying one thing over and over, "I can't wait for football season to start."

Why would fans be so excited for another typical losing, disappointing and boring UTEP football season?

Maybe it's because they really believe the new three words being thrown around to describe the new football program, "fearless, fast and physical."

That's how new football coach Scotty Walden describes the style of play his Miners will undertake this season.

Walden and his Miners took the Sun Bowl field for the first-time last week for spring drills. UTEP will hold 15 spring practice which will culminate in the Miners' Spring Game on April 20.

And they don't waste any time. Walden and his players take the field at 7:15 a.m. for three hours of getting acquainted with his new fast and fiery system.

Unlike the last decade of UTEP offensive football, which has relied mostly on the running game, Walden will turn everything around and turn

the Miners into a fast-breaking passing attack that puts all kinds of pressure on opposing defenses.

In other words, win or lose, the new coach is going to bring excitement to the Sun Bowl.

And why should we believe him? Because he's already done it. At smaller Austin Peay, Walden was 26-14 in his four years there, he had them scoring 34 points a game, compared to UTEP's 19.9.

In fact, Walden's offense compares very favorably to UTEP's in almost all categories, Austin Peay averaged 274 yards passing to UTEP's 217, more total offense 427 to 362, and more touchdowns 53 to 29.

In another drastic change, the Miners have always prided themselves on taking their time, taking almost all the time off the play clock, keeping the ball longer than their opponents.

Walden has said his UTEP offense will be running plays every 12-13 seconds. They are going to run to the line of scrimmage and go again, trying to catch their opponents off guard

while wearing them out at the same time.

Many of the players have already said they have an entirely new attitude this season. They say it's easy to feed off the enthusiasm and optimism of their new coach.

And why not? Coach Walden is a walking ball of excitement. He's as hyper as can be, and he's as positive as anyone I've ever witnessed.

He went crazy getting fans excited at a UTEP volleyball game, jumping all around the court, waving his arms, getting the crowd fired up.

There was the time he went crazy at a UTEP basketball game, tearing off his shirt, exposing his blue and orange painted chest and jumping on a table waving to the crowd to get them pumped up.

His antics are contagious. Players have said that just after spending five minutes talking to the coach, you're already willing to run through a wall for the guy.

And that's what the UTEP football program needs the most, a change.

A change of heart, of attitude, of confidence.

Like we said, Walden is holding his spring practices right now and he's busy evaluating what kind of talent he has to work with.

The first thing he has to do, like any team, is establish who his quarterback will be. The Miners return Cade McConnell, who began last season as the fourth string QB, but ended up starting the last six games because of injuries to the other guys.

McConnell completed 53 percent of his passes at 205 yards per game with six touchdowns and four interceptions.

While McConnell is leading right now, there are six other guys competing for that starting spot. There'll be tough competition at every position.

Don't get me wrong, I wouldn't expect for the Miners to go to a bowl game next season. But the changes they're going through should impact seasons two, three and four of the Walden regime.

Now... where's the nearest wall?

Senior moment By Matilda Charles

You know better, right?

A retiree fell for a scam that drained his account of all his savings. It took a lifetime to save the money and only a minute for it to vanish. All it took was him giving information to a scammer.

The gentleman received an email saying he was owed a refund and asked that he fill in his banking details. He believed that email was from his bank. Within moments of sending the email, his account was emptied. Not only that, but he was then instructed on the phone, by someone he believed was a bank security officer, to hand over his credit cards to a bank courier because those accounts were also compromised.

The scammer quickly went on a spending spree. It's rare, but the criminal was actually caught. While he might get a few years in jail, the victim has been left to try to pick up the pieces of his life, with no hope of getting that money back.

Some basic hints for safety:

- If you're uneasy about any portion of a call, HANG UP.
- Don't do banking on your phone or computer, even if you know what you're doing with those devices.
- If you get a call from someone claiming to be at your bank, hang up. Dial the number of the bank yourself and find out if they were actually looking for you. Especially do not follow their instructions if the "security" people at your bank insist you need to transfer your money into a different account to keep it "safe."
- If you're asked to call *72 followed by a different number, HANG UP. Do not dial *72. It's a call forwarding option that prisoners, callers to 900 sex line numbers and people in foreign countries use as a way to charge expensive calls to your phone.

Don't panic if you suspect you have a scammer on the line. Just hang up.

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Send Your Newsbrief To:
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WELL-DEFINED ACROSS	62 "Put _ Happy Face"	130 Bible translation, e.g.: Abbr.	34 City in Sicily	82 CSA soldier
1 Ran after	64 DiCaprio of "Titanic"	131 Lobby sofas	35 Once, once	83 Web address
8 _ oil (trendy marijuana extract, for short)	70 120-Across #5		40 Word file alternative	85 Certify
11 Old TV ET	75 More furtive	DOWN	41 _ polloi	86 The "E" of UAE
14 Feudal peons	76 Possess	1 The Sims or Minecraft, say	43 Syringe amts.	87 Overturns
19 More ill-bred	77 Gets the impression	2 Muse of astronomy	44 Stretch (out)	88 Singer Sumac
20 Loaf in a deli	78 Core belief	3 Fast part of a river ride	46 _ Lingus (Irish carrier)	89 Word before goblin
21 Palme _ (Cannes award)	81 Light tan	4 Govt. stipend	47 Writer Dahl	90 Employed
22 "La Traviata," e.g.	84 Groom's vow	5 Adm.'s org.	49 The Beatles' " _ Work It Out"	91 _ bad example
23 120-Across #1	85 120-Across #6	6 Brain wave test: Abbr.	50 Tequila plant	92 Split
25 "Over here!"	94 "Take _" ("Jot this note")	7 Harry Potter bully	51 Sacred image	93 Ritalin treats it, for short
26 Sieved, as potatoes	95 Water spigots	8 Burial vaults	52 Big Apple address abbr.	98 Science writer Willy or ESPN anchor Bob
27 Folk rocker DiFranco	96 Extort money from	9 Poet Percy _ Shelley	53 Sch. near the Rio Grande	99 Urge strongly
28 Drink holders	97 Fit to reside in	10 _ Moines, Iowa	54 Axes, e.g.	101 Kind of steak
29 120-Across #2	100 Architect Saarinen	11 One-off, as a committee	55 Scrooge's outbursts	102 Like some headsets
31 120-Across #3	103 Island near Bora Bora	12 Lerner's songwriting partner	59 U.S. spy org.	104 Chemist's "I"
36 Suffix of enzymes	107 Rage	13 Skillet	60 Fluid in a pen	105 Brief pang
37 Don effortlessly, as shoes	108 120-Across #7	14 Ilk	61 Anxiousness	106 For a really long time
38 Toxin-fighting fluids	113 120-Across #8	15 Grand-scale	63 In times past	109 Muscle car booster
39 Functional unit of a kidney	116 Male sweetie	16 Novelist Rand	65 Scot's denial	110 Macabre
42 Wield a saber or foil	117 Day, to Juanita	67 Varnish stuff	66 Novelist Rand	111 Interval
45 Sky twinkler	118 Totally lost	68 "Judge _" (Stallone film)	68 "Judge _" (Stallone film)	112 Is really angry
48 Stray calf	119 Bruins' Bobby	69 _ buco	71 Artist Jan van der _	114 Lotto variant
49 120-Across #4	120 What this puzzle literally provides eight times	72 "Nola" composer Felix	72 "Nola" composer Felix	115 Deposits, as eggs
55 Plead	124 Wee	73 Actor Wilson	73 Actor Wilson	120 License-issuing agcy.
56 Cabinet chief: Abbr.	125 Hitter's stat	74 How much '90s music was recorded	74 How much '90s music was recorded	121 Palindromic file suffix
57 Muse of poetry	126 Single-named R&B singer	79 LAX info	79 LAX info	122 Fitting
58 Mimosa tree, e.g.	127 Erase	80 High-quality	80 High-quality	123 Cashew, e.g.
	128 Some Canadian gas stations			
	129 Tot's "piggy"			

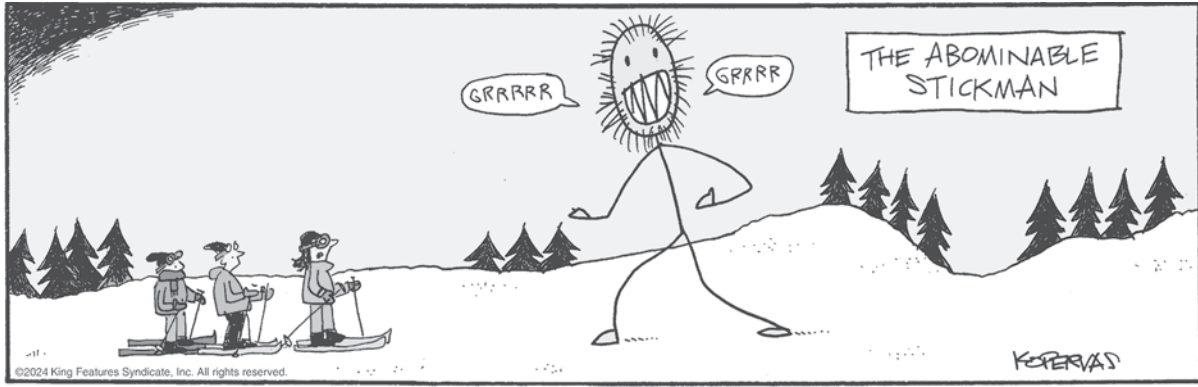
Answer Page 4

Super Crossword

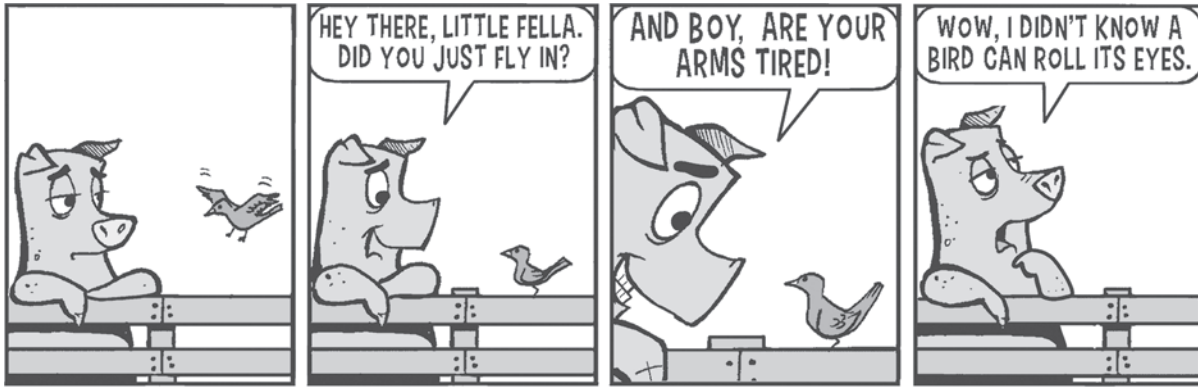
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128								129						131						

Comix

OUT ON A LIMB By Gary Kopervas



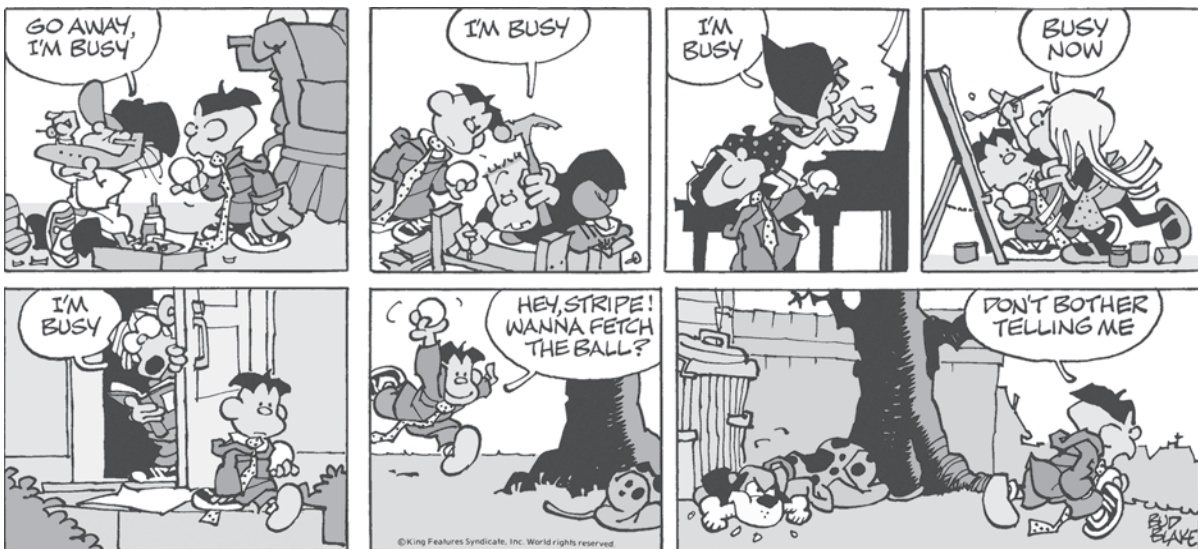
AMBER WAVES By Dave T. Phipps



THE SPATS By Jeff Pickering



TIGER By Bud Blake



Lowry

From Page 2

consumers are spending the highest proportion of their disposable income on food since 1991.

The focus on shrinkflation is a variant of the corporate-greed argument advanced by Elizabeth Warren and other progressives. It maintains that inflation is an artifact of companies arbitrarily deciding to raise prices to boost their profits. There is a basic implausibility in this theory. It assumes that for several decades during the long period of low inflation in the U.S. corporations didn't use this pricing power. Then, they suddenly decided to wield it beginning in 2021, coinciding with a period of supply-chain disruptions, loose monetary policy and extravagant federal spending – all of which one would expect to be drivers of inflation.

As for shrinkflation, even the consumer advocate who has been briefing the White House on this trend, Edgar Dworsky, admits that “these tactics tend to become more prevalent during times of high inflation,” in

the words of a CNBC report.

The causes of higher food prices, by the way, aren't a mystery. Why is the price of beef elevated? The supply of cattle has declined. What's up with the more expensive Oreos? Cocoa prices, The Wall Street Journal reports, recently passed a 46-year record. And labor costs have gone up with increases in the minimum wage in states across the country.

Still, The New York Times reports that the White House is considering new executive actions to crack down on shrinkflation. Assuming it's within the power of the presidency to influence the size of bags, boxes and bottles of food and drink, forcing them to stay larger would only render the underlying price increases more plain.

One might think that the nation's chief executive would have more important things to worry about than the size of Gatorade bottles, but such is the White House's political desperation on food prices that nothing is too inane or nonsensical.

Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review. ©2024 by King Features Synd., Inc.

Barrett's esophagus leads to tough medical choices

DEAR DR. ROACH: I am a retired male over 65 and a former occasional cigar smoker. I quit 15 years ago after I was diagnosed with Barrett's esophagus. I was also a former drinker and quit seven years ago. I regularly completed all the biopsies as required and took my proton-pump inhibitor (PPI) daily as instructed.



This year, I read an article about PPIs contributing to dementia and neuropathy, which I have. My primary care physician suggested that I switch to over-the-counter H2 blockers as a safer approach. I developed an irregular heart rhythm and soaring blood pressure.

I was then diagnosed with atrial fibrillation (AFib). My stress test and echocardiogram are normal for my age. I am now on some heavy-duty beta blockers, blood thinners and a very expensive rhythm-control drug.

A book I recently read written by two top cardiologists stated that long-term use of PPIs is dangerous and can cause AFib, but a recent article published by the National Institute of Health states the opposite. I also read that an irritated esophagus stimulates the esophagus nerve and triggers AFib. I'm confused now.

Because Barrett's vastly increases my chances for getting a very aggressive cancer, doing nothing is not an option. I have already modified and continue to modify my diet, but that only goes so far. And as I'm sure you are aware of, a stroke caused by AFib is often life-threatening.

My complicated question is, which professional approach would you recommend: PPIs or H2 blockers? Is there a third option? – B.B.

There is not a definitive answer on whether PPIs, like omeprazole, increase the risk of AFib. Studies are potentially confounded by the fact that people with AFib sometimes think they have stomach problems and may take a PPI, leading to a false association between the PPI and AFib. As you say, there have also been studies that suggest a decreased risk of AFib in people who use PPIs.

In my mind, the increased risk of adenocarcinoma of the esophagus as a result of untreated stomach acid reflux in a person with Barrett's esophagus is the key in this situation, as Barrett's is a condition where abnormal lining of the esophagus occurs due to years of acid exposure.

I do not believe over-the-counter H2 blockers, like famotidine (Pepcid), are adequate enough to reduce the risk of esophageal cancer, so I advise patients in your situation to use PPIs, despite their known risks.

The data suggesting a risk of dementia are weak. While there might be a small risk, the risk isn't high enough to avoid using a PPI in a person with Barrett's. B12 deficiency is absolutely a risk in people taking long-term PPIs. Low B12 can certainly lead to neuropathy, but both can be prevented and treated by testing for B12 deficiency and by getting supplementation, if needed.

I am very glad to hear you are getting routine endoscopic surveillance and biopsies so that any abnormal growth of the esophagus can be identified and treated promptly.

Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu. ©2024 North America Synd., Inc. All Rights Reserved.

† AMERICAN LUNG ASSOCIATION of Texas

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1-800-LUNG-USA



Moore Texas by Roger Moore

March 16, 1894: Notorious killer John Wesley Hardin is pardoned. While in jail he passes the bar to become a lawyer.

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: Q equals P

CFNJG RYGZTCTGJ CFRC
 YRSG R QRJCN'DJ BTIG YNDG
 QBGRJRZC, T BTSG CN ERBB
 CFGY QDGREFGD ENYINDCJ.

Answer Page 4

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Weekly SUDOKU

by Linda Thistle

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

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 4

♦♦♦ HOO BOY!

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Expanded PACT Act



by Freddy Groves

Expanded benefits for the PACT Act have kicked in years sooner than expected. As of recently, March 5, 2024, veterans who were exposed to toxins can get VA health care without applying for VA disability benefits first.

The PACT Act covers over 20 presumptive illnesses for exposure to Agent Orange and other toxins, as well as the burn pits, radiation, oil well fires, depleted uranium and more. The covered illnesses include emphysema, chronic bronchitis, a dozen types of cancer and interstitial lung disease.

Deployment wasn't necessary; veterans were exposed to asbestos, firefighting foam, paints, chemicals, pesticides, Camp Lejeune water and more here in the U.S.

If you filed before and were turned down, file again or call. The VA is supposed

to go through the files and contact you, but don't wait on that.

If you're already enrolled in VA health care, call your local VA health facility and ask for your initial screening for toxin exposure. Don't wait on this; get a baseline test.

To get more information, call 800-698-2411 (800-MYVA411).

Or go online to VA.gov/PACT and scroll through the information. You'll find links to file for VA disability, a supplemental claim and more. Read about military exposures at www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures.

For all the millions the VA has spent to inform veterans about PACT, there are some they're leaving out: members of the Maine National Guard who trained at the Canadian military support base in Gagetown, New Brunswick, Canada. In 1966 and 1967, the place was saturated with Agents Orange and Purple as a means of testing effectiveness in killing foliage.

In 2005, the Canadian

government did site testing of the ground, water and air. They ended up handing out money to Canadians who'd been there.

Gagetown is still used for National Guard training, not only for units from Maine but other states as well. People became ill, of course, from exposure, but they're not eligible for VA health care for exposure to Agent Orange or any of the other "rainbow" of toxin colors at Gagetown.

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- "I had to pick up a bunch of BBs that spilled in our garage. It was very aggravating, until I decided to get out my vacuum. I put a very thin sock (didn't have any panty hose) on the end, and tucked it into the hose. I secured it with a zip tie. I was able to suck up most of the BBs, and they went right back in the container." – E.L. in North Carolina

- If you make your own broth, you can freeze cubes in easy-to-measure amounts by using your muffin tin. Measure out broth in half cup or cup amounts, then freeze. When done, pop them out into a freezer-safe baggie.

- Try this trick to increase the volume when listening to music on your phone (without earbuds, that is): Place it in a deep bowl. The bowl amplifies and directs the sound.

- Chrome is easily cleaned and shined up with vinegar. Keep a misting bottle in the bathroom to give handles a quick swipe after getting ready in the morning or evening.

- Ice cream cones with a flat bottom make a great container for cupcakes. Fill cones two-thirds full with batter, bake as directed, and you have cupcake cones! Frost and go!

- If you have too many suds in the sink (or the tub), try pouring salt on the suds. They die down and can be washed away without creating more suds.

Send your tips to Now Here's a Tip, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803. ©2024 King Features Synd., Inc.

GO FIGURE!

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.

DIFFICULTY: ★★★

★ Moderate ★★ Difficult
 ★★★ GO FIGURE!

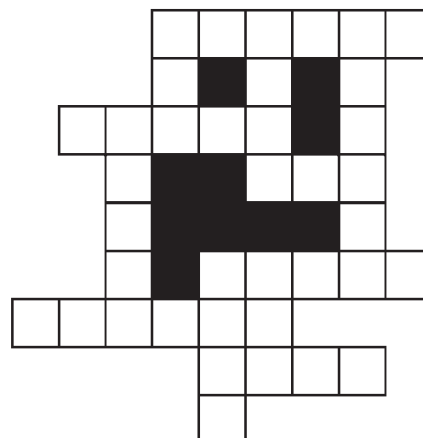
Answer Page 4

		-		+				= 11
-			+			+		
	+			+				= 9
+			+			÷		
	+			×				= 68
=			=			=		
13			14			3		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

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- EFE
- ROANCE
- ♥ DEGOL
- ♥ NEOC
- MEFIAN
- OSL
- TECL
- FAFLO
- ♥ NOE
- PELSIC
- ELMGA
- ♥ EDLA



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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