



– Photo by Alfredo Vasquez

UPGRADES MAY COME – The 62-year-old Vinton mini mill facility, above, is located on 230 acres along Interstate 10 near the Vinton Road exit. The owners are considering a multi-million investment to modernize the mill.

Major construction projects will impact communities

By Alfredo Vasquez
Special to the Courier

EL PASO COUNTY – Construction projects in El Paso County seem to be underway everywhere—from the far east part of the borderland to the communities in the Upper Valley. Three projects, in particular, that will have a significant impact in this region are the new police station and court facility in Horizon City, the new VA Health Care Clinic in Fort Bliss, and the anticipated multimillion dollar expansion of the Vinton Steel mini mill in the Village of Vinton.

Horizon City

The new police station is “a significant milestone for our community,” Horizon City Police Chief Marco A. Vargas stated during the groundbreaking ceremony held recently. “The milestone not only marks the beginning of a new building but the start

of a new chapter for our community,” he asserted. The new Horizon City municipal building will house the police department, municipal court, and public works office.

The Horizon City Police Department was established nearly 36 years ago. The department has grown to about 30 full-time officers as the city has grown from 5,000 residents in 2000 to a current estimated population of more than 24,000, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Horizon City and the neighboring areas of Eastlake and Mission Ridge are among the fastest-growing parts of the county.

The \$10 million project, which has been in the works for years, is being built at 15005 Darrington Road near Horizon Boulevard, across the street from the current police facility. Work on the project is expected to be completed by the fall of 2025, according to Horizon City Police Department officials. The new building was designed by Exigo Architecture, and the contractor is Dantex Construction.

At the groundbreaking event along with Police

Chief Vargas were several local area dignitaries including Horizon City Mayor Andres Renteria, El Paso County Commissioner Iliana Holguin, the former El Paso District Attorney Bill Hicks, Horizon City town officials, and law enforcement representatives from the surrounding communities.

Fort Bliss

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the U.S. Corps of Engineers also recently held a groundbreaking ceremony for the new El Paso VA Health Care Clinic in Fort Bliss. The new facilities’ price tag is projected to be more than \$700 million after equipment and other costs are included, VA officials stated.

The project consists of a new six-story, 492,000-square-foot ambulatory care facility that will be located on the William Beaumont Army Medical Center campus in the county’s eastside

See **PROJECTS**, Page 4



– Photo by Rick Shrum

JUST GETTING STARTED – Construction of the new police station, above, represents a collective effort to enhance the safety and well-being of every member of community, according to Horizon City Police Chief Marco A. Vargas.

Trump's strong start

It's not 2016 again.

President-elect Donald Trump is off to a strong start with markedly fewer obstructions than the last

time he won.

In football terms, he has a lot of green space ahead of him. In nautical terms, it's plain sailing. In political terms, it might not be a honeymoon, but no one is throwing any furniture, either.

Naturally, there are all sorts of potential pitfalls.

Some of Trump's more controversial cabinet picks could, if confirmed, blow up once they are in place. (Does anyone believe that Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s tenure at the Department of Health and Human Services will be smooth and uneventful?) Republicans only have two votes to spare in the House. Events will take a hand, and so will Trump's mercurial nature.

We are in a much different place than eight years ago, though. When Trump won in 2016, the shock to the system was so great that the body politic reacted fiercely and reflexively.

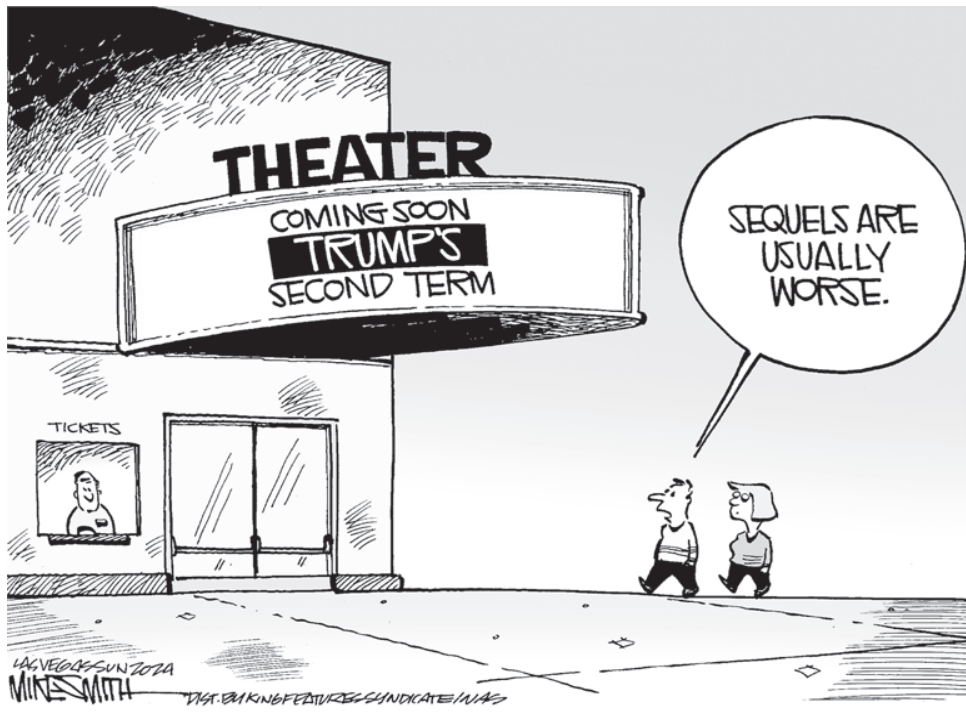
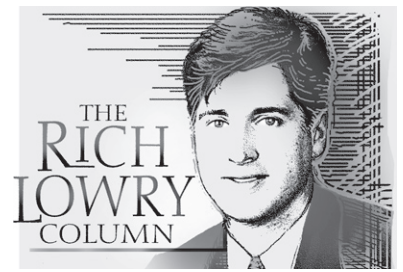
Trump was treated as a virus and every antibody attacked him, from activists in the street to the director of the FBI.

This time, the reaction is much more muted. Despite all the fevered warnings of an existential threat to democracy, when former top Kamala Harris advisers did an election post-mortem on the podcast "Pod Save America," they talked about how they could do better next time – in other words, there will be a next time.

Despite the insistence of his enemies that Trump can't be "normalized," he's been an inescapable fixture of American politics for about a decade now, with at least another four years ahead (he could well continue to dominate the Republican Party even after his second term ends).

Like it or not, Trump is mainstream. He shows up at those most American events – football games and MMA fights – and gets applause. He eats McDonald's. He himself is part of the pop culture.

This time, unlike in 2016, there were no protests



See LOWRY, Page 7

December ceremony held for nursing graduates

By Beau Bagley
Special to the Courier

EL PASO COUNTY – El Paso Community College (EPCC) Nursing Program celebrated both Associate Degree of Nursing (ADN) and Vocational Nursing (VN) graduates with pinning ceremonies on December 12, 2024 at the EPCC Administrative Services Center.

76 ADN's earned their pin and graduated Friday, December 13, 2024, at the EPCC Commencement ceremony, while 16 VN's earned their pin and will also walk at Commencement.

"While working in the medical field after completing the Paramedic Program at EPCC, I felt I wanted more

and enrolled in the Nursing Program," ADN graduate Augustin Carmona, said. "It has been a rewarding journey juggling two children and school, but everything clicked."

The ADN Master of Ceremonies were Jenifer Heredia and Kristin Yañez, ADN Nursing graduates, members of the Student Nursing Association, and pinning committee members. Student Nurses Association President, and ADN Nursing graduate, Jose Perez was the featured student speaker. In addition to obtaining his Associate Degree in Nursing from EPCC, he has fulfilled the requirements to obtain his bachelors of science in nursing from Texas Tech University School of Nursing concurrently. The faculty speaker was Nursing instructor

Stephanie Baldwin.

"We are very happy to graduate 92 nurses today," Dean of Nursing Dr. Hafid Guerrero said. "Most of our graduates already have jobs secured in the region, which will help alleviate the nursing shortage and improve healthcare in our community."

The VN Master of Ceremonies was Nursing instructor Brenda Bueno, and Alejandro Martinez, a VN pinning committee member, gave the student welcome.

"There is a past version of you that is so proud of how far you have come," VN Nursing graduate Rebecca Gomez, a VN pinning committee member, said.

Established in 1972, EPCC's nursing program is the oldest nursing program/school in our community.

EPCC graduates approximately 175 nurses per year from all of the programs, with 65 full-time and part-time faculty, and will be graduating our 50th class in 2025. "Our graduates work in many roles in our community and beyond, from direct patient care to administration, research, and higher education," Guerrero added.

National Nurses Week is celebrated yearly, between May 6, which is National Nurses Day, and May 12, which is the birth date of Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing. This week is celebrated in healthcare facilities, nursing schools, and anywhere where nurses work.

Visit www.epcc.edu/Academics/Health/Nursing for more information on the Nursing program.

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Years
2025

WEST TEXAS COUNTY COURIER

SERVING ANTHONY, VINTON, CANUTILLO, EAST MONTANA, HORIZON, SOCORRO, CLIVE, FARENS, SAN ELIZABO AND TORNILLO

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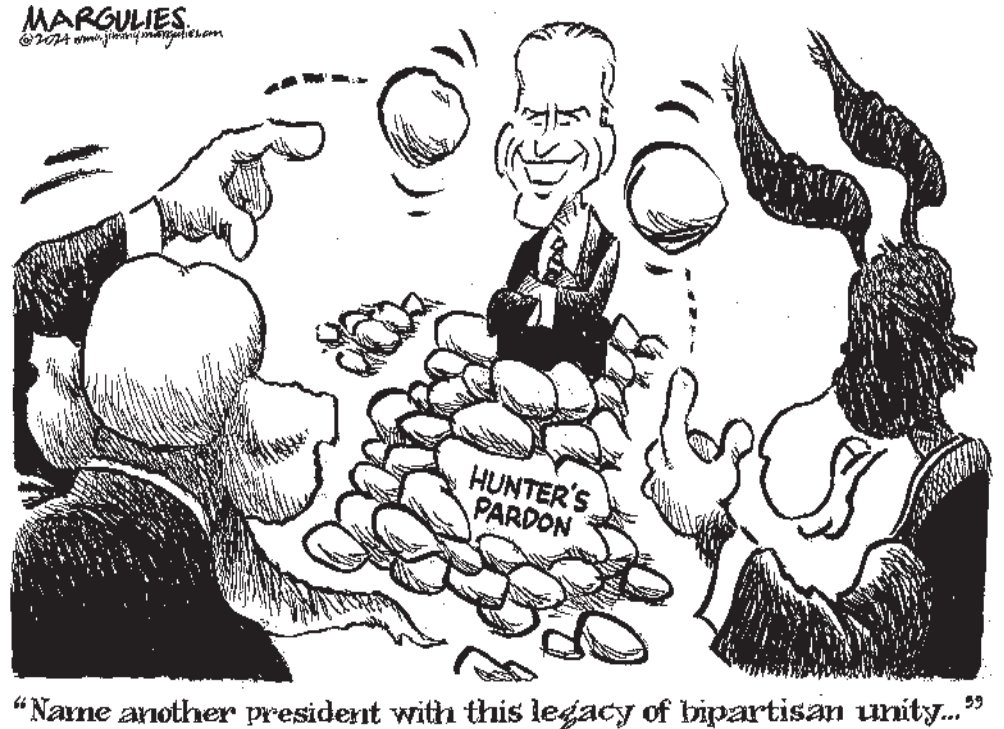
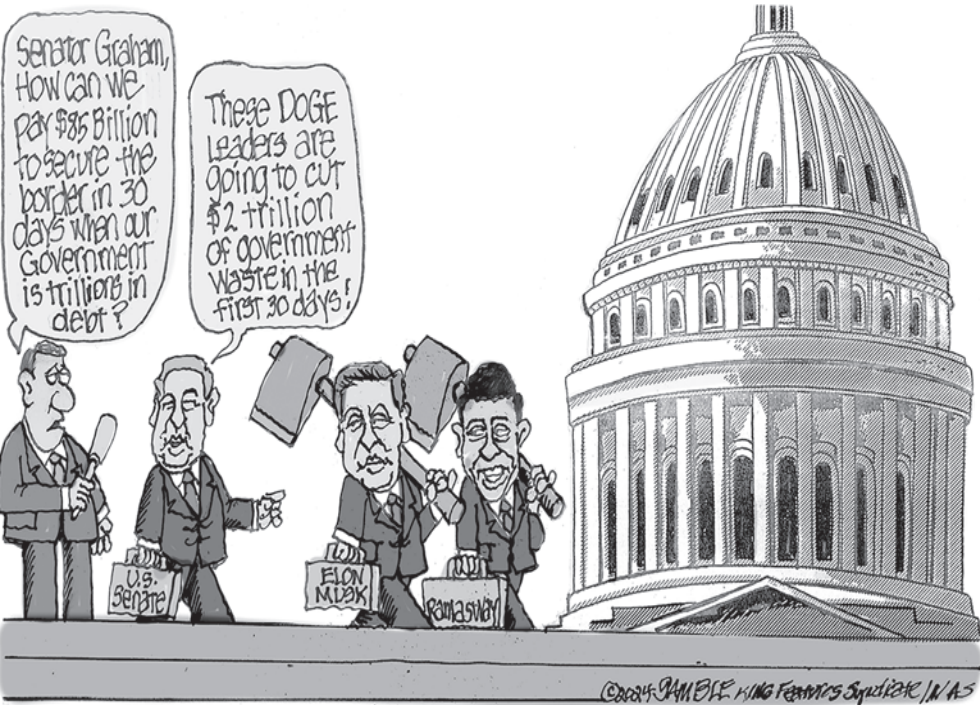
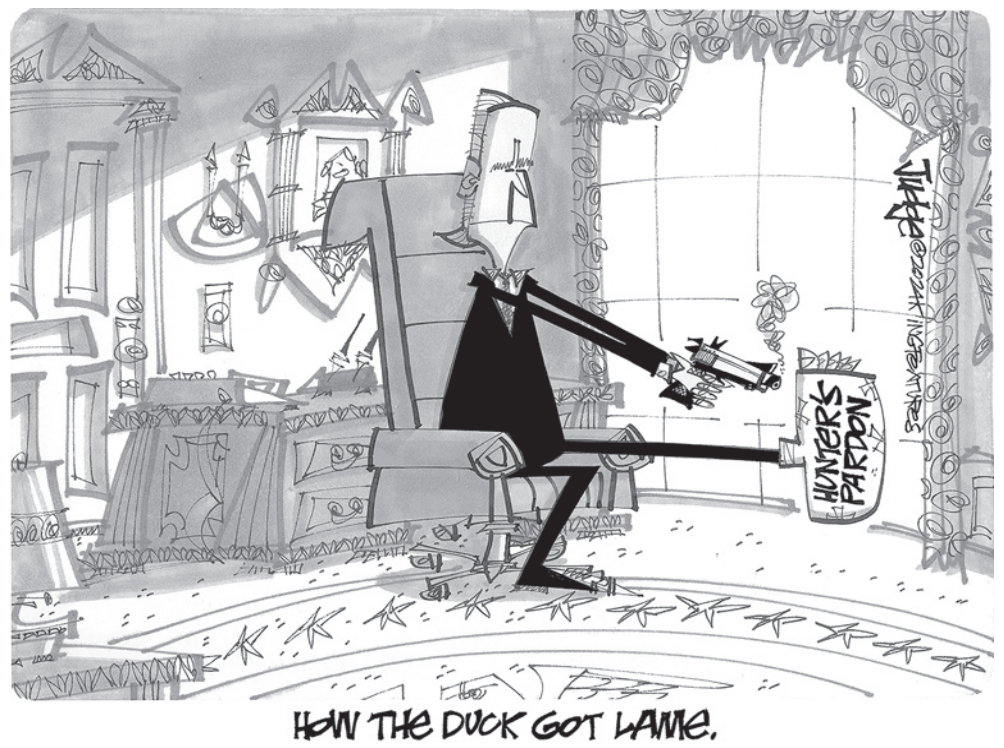
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PROUD PARENTS – Vocational Nurse Aaron Stevens was pinned by his mother, Rocio, as his father David looked on. The ceremony was held on December 12, 2024.

– Photo courtesy El Paso Community College





– Photo by Alfredo Vasque

DESERT START UP – The new El Paso VA Health Care Clinic will be located on 36 acres of land – the desert scrub in the foreground – across the street from the three-year-old William Beaumont Army Medical Center, in the background, in East El Paso.

Projects

From Page 1

near the intersection of Loop 375 and Spur 601.

The state-of-the-art facility will include an 18,000 square-foot outdoor garden and café that will connect to an indoor canteen and the central utility power plant. Froy Garza, the executive director of the El Paso VA Health Care System, stated during the groundbreaking event that the facility is projected to open by 2029.

Among the services that will be provided to borderland veterans and their families will be pharmacy, radiology, pathology, audiology, prosthetics, rehabilitation for traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries, women’s health, mental health and

substance abuse programs, dental, eye, and surgical care, according to VA officials.

The Smith Group, headquartered in Detroit, is heading the work in the interior architecture, interior design, medical planning, fire protection engineering, specialty lighting design, and landscape architecture for the project. Joint venture partner HKS of Dallas is leading the exterior architecture, site planning, and sustainable design certification. The Clark Construction Group, which has its main offices in Bethesda, Maryland, is the general contractor.

Village of Vinton

Although no official word has been confirmed, the Japanese company that owns the Vinton Steel mini mill is considering a \$420 million expansion

of the 62-year-old facility located in El Paso County’s Upper Valley.

The anticipated expansion would replace the steel mill’s two electric arc furnaces with a new, state-of-the-art furnace, construct 1.5 million square feet of new buildings, and make other improvements that would double the facility’s production of steel products from recycled steel, according to Vinton Steel’s application for a Texas economic incentive program.

The new furnace would be designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and reduce electricity consumption, which would improve the upper valley communities’ air quality environment. In addition to boosting production capacity, the expansion would also create new jobs in the local community.

The Vinton mini mill, which is located

on 230 acres along Interstate 10 near the Vinton Road exit, turns old motor vehicles, discarded major household appliances, and industrial scrap metal into new steel products, such as reinforcing steel bars, or rebar, grinding steel balls, and smooth steel bars for industrial construction and mining industries, according to company officials.

Parent company Kyoei Steel and Village of Vinton officials stated that they could not discuss details of the possible expansion until they hear from the Texas Governor’s office and the board makes its decision, according to a reliable source.

If the expansion isn’t approved, then other options will be considered, according to Eduardo Gonzalez, who has been with Vinton Steel for 15 years and currently oversees Vinton Steel as assistant vice president.

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Strange BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

- You’re more likely to have weirder, scarier and sexier dreams when sleeping on your stomach.
- The cymothoa exigua, a parasite that severs the blood vessels of a fish’s tongue and becomes a new functional tongue, is the only known parasite capable of replacing an entire organ.
- Ever wonder how the tradition of leaving hand and footprints in front of Grauman’s Chinese Theater in Hollywood got started? By accident – when silent film actress Norma Talmadge stepped on wet cement.
- In 1978, DC put out a “Superman vs. Muhammad Ali” comic book. While the plot deals with hostile aliens,

the book’s main highlight is the whooping Superman gets in a sparring match with “The Greatest”!

- Are you a java junkie? Scientists found specific genes that are more caffeine-loving than others, so addiction to it might be genetic. In other words, you can go ahead and blame your parents for your coffee obsession.
- “Family Feud” host Richard Dawson met his second wife, Gretchen Johnson, when she was a contestant on the show in 1981. And yes, he did kiss her.
- After four years of planning and two months of working nightly from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m., a team of hackers at MIT turned their Earth and Planetary Sciences Department building into a giant, multicolored, playable Tetris game.
- It is considered unlucky to clean your house on the Chinese New Year. You risk

sweeping away the good luck of the coming year.

- “Gigi” author Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette could only write after she had plucked fleas off her dog.
 - If you pour cold water into a person’s ear, their eyes will move in the direction of the opposite ear. If you pour warm water into their ear, their eyes will move toward that ear. Used to test for brain damage, this process is called “caloric stimulation.”
 - Some areas in Scotland and Japan switched to blue street lights at night and saw a decrease in crime and suicide rates.
- Thought for the Day: “I realized that if I wait until I am no longer afraid to act, write, speak, be, I’ll be sending messages on the Ouija board, cryptic complaints from the other side.” – Audre Lorde

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CryptoQuip Answer

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Moments in time
THE HISTORY CHANNEL

- On Dec. 23, 1982, Chaminade University of Honolulu, a school with only 900 students, beat the top-ranked University of Virginia by a mere five points in one of the most stunning upsets in American basketball history. As ESPN's Chris Berman remarked, "We can't tell you what happened, but the No. 1 team in college basketball has lost to – we don't even know who they are."
- On Dec. 24, 1851, a fire at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., destroyed approximately two-thirds of its 55,000 volumes, including most of Thomas Jefferson's personal library.
- On Dec. 25, 1962, the film adaptation of Harper Lee's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel "To Kill a Mockingbird" opened in Los Angeles. It was nominated for eight Oscars and won three, and the American Film Institute rated lead character Atticus Finch as the greatest movie hero of the 20th century.
- On Dec. 26, 1820, Moses Austin, a merchant turned mine owner, met with Spanish authorities in San Antonio to ask permission for 300 Anglo-American families to settle in Texas, in the hope

- of recovering from bankruptcy via the establishment of a new colony. His request was approved, but he died before he could carry it out, so the task was completed by his son, with more than 20,000 arrivals eventually succeeding in making Texas an independent state.
- On Dec. 27, 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered his secretary of war to seize properties belonging to the Montgomery Ward company after it refused to comply with a labor agreement, announcing that the government would "not tolerate any interference with war production in this critical hour."
 - On Dec. 28, 1908, the worst earthquake in recorded European history struck the Straits of Messina in southern Italy, leveling the cities of Messina and Reggio di Calabria and ultimately causing the deaths of an estimated 100,000 people.
 - On Dec. 29, 1170, Archbishop Thomas Becket was murdered in Canterbury Cathedral by four of King Henry II's knights, apparently on his orders. Four years later, Henry was forced to do penance at Becket's tomb, and his efforts to end the separation between church and state came to an end.
 - On Dec. 30, 1988, President Ronald Reagan and President-elect George Bush were

- subpoenaed to testify at the trial of Oliver North, a former White House aide implicated in the Iran-Contra affair, in which arms were secretly sold to Iran while profits from the sale were diverted to guerrillas attempting to topple the Nicaraguan government.
- On Dec. 31, 1781, America's first bank, the Bank of North America, received its charter from the Confederation Congress. It opened in Philadelphia on Jan. 7, 1782.
- On Jan. 1, 2008, Sidney Crosby of the Pittsburgh Penguins won the NHL's inaugural Winter Classic, the first regular-season game played outdoors in the U.S. in the league's history, at New York's Ralph Wilson Stadium.
- On Jan. 2, 2004, the NASA spacecraft Stardust collected dust grains from the Wild 2 comet, whose material was later revealed to contain glycine, an amino acid that is an essential building block of life.
- On Jan. 3, 1973, Congressman James Abourezk became the first Arab American to serve in the U.S. Senate, representing his home state of South Dakota.
- On Jan. 4, 1964, Mary Sullivan was raped and strangled to death in her Boston apartment, after which her killer, Albert DeSalvo

(aka the Boston Strangler) left a card reading "Happy New Year's" against her foot. Sullivan would turn out to be the final victim of DeSalvo's notorious crime spree, in which he assaulted and murdered a total of 13 women between 1962 and 1964. Under a deal with prosecutors, he wasn't charged with or convicted of those crimes, but received a life sentence for a series of other assaults, and was stabbed to death by an unidentified fellow inmate in 1973.

- On Jan. 5, 1643, Anne Clarke, of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, was granted a divorce from her husband, Denis Clarke, by Boston's Quarter Court. Denis confessed to abandoning Anne and their two children for another woman, by whom he also had two children, and refused to return to Anne. It was the first record of a legal divorce in the American colonies.

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Fabens Independent School District Public Notice of Meeting

Fabens Independent School District will hold a public hearing to discuss the District's 2023-2024 Annual Report. The meeting will be held at 6:30 P.M. on Wednesday, January 15, 2025 in the Fabens Independent School District's Board Room at 821 N.E. "G" Avenue, Fabens, Texas.

The public is invited to attend in person. For more information, call (915) 765-2600, x2115.

Junta Pública

El Distrito escolar independiente de Fabens celebrará una audiencia pública para discutir el informe anual 2023-2024. La reunión se celebrará a las 6:30 p.m. el miércoles, 15 de enero de 2025 en la sala de juntas de Fabens ISD, 821 N.E. "G" Avenue, Fabens, Texas.

Se invita al público a asistir en persona. Para obtener más información, llame al (915) 765-2600, x2115.

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A look back at the top 10 athletes of 2024

By Steve Escajeda
Special to the Courier

The year 2024 left us with many interesting sports stories that we'll be talking about for years to come.

And of course, when there are many interesting sports stories, it means there were plenty of outstanding athletes behind those stories.

Today we're going to take a look at who I believe are the Top-10 sports athletes of 2024, in no particular order.

Patrick Mahomes

How can any list now-a-days not include Mr. Mahomes? The Kansas City Chiefs quarterback led his team to a Super Bowl victory for the third time in his seven years as a starter.

And the way things are going this year, don't be surprised if he does it again.

Paul Skenes

The Pirates' rookie pitcher exploded onto the MLB scene this year at the tender age of 22. His fastball usually flies by the hitter at over 98 mph. Skenes was the first player taken in the 2023 draft and quickly made his way to the majors. He was so dominant that he was the first rookie pitcher to start the All-Star game in nearly 30 years.

Simone Biles

It's hard to think of Biles as an older woman, but in the sport of gymnastics - she really is. She made history at the Paris Games by being the oldest gymnast to win an Olympic all-around gold medal since 1952. This now gives the 27-year-old 11 total Olympic medals.

Juan Soto

Soto made as much noise with his pocketbook as he did with his bat this season. He had a great season, helping lead the Yankees to the World Series. He batted .288 with 166 hits, 41

homers and 109 RBIs. After his one season with the Yanks, he went out and signed the largest deal in sports history with the New York Mets for 15 years and \$765 million.

Jim Harbaugh

He led the Wolverines to the NCAA national championship. Harbaugh then left the program to go back to the NFL with the L.A. Chargers, whom he seems to be leading to a playoff berth in his first season there. Harbaugh led the 49ers to the Super Bowl back in 2013.

Travis Hunter

The Colorado Buffaloes wide receiver/defensive back won the Heisman Trophy this year. He was one of the best pass catchers AND pass defenders in the country. He is a throwback to guys who would never come off the field. He caught 92 passes for 1,152 yards and 15 touchdowns. He also had four interceptions.

Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown

I put these two in together because they led the Boston Celtics to the NBA title this year. But they didn't seem to get the respect they deserved. Brown, despite winning Finals MVP wasn't named to the Olympic team, while Tatum made the Olympic team, but didn't play a single second in two of their games. Watch out for this season, Tatum and Brown are good enough, but an angry Tatum and Brown...

Victor Wembanyama

The 7-foot-3, 20-year-old San Antonio Spurs star took the NBA by storm in 2024. He averaged 21 points, 10 rebounds and 4 assists per game in 2023-24. This year his numbers are 24 points, 10 rebounds, 4 assists and 3.5 blocks per game. Don't forget that his best stat is that he is just 20.

Shohei Ohtani

The Dodgers star hurt his arm a year

ago and couldn't pitch this season, all he could do was hit. What the Dodgers didn't know was that he could also run. The power hitter belted 54 homers, while stealing 59 bases, making him the first 50-50 player in history.

Caitlin Clark

I don't think anyone had a better, and more controversial, year than Clark. First she leads her Iowa squad to the NCAA title game, she's breaks the all-time scoring record and is named the Collegiate Player of the Year.

She's drafted into the WNBA and her presence sets all kinds of viewing and attendance records for women's basketball. This brings out a lot of anger from other players who are jealous of her success. What will 2025 be like for her?

Another sports year gone and a new one is here. See you with my new list in about a year.

Happy New Sports Year everyone!

Senior moment By Matilda Charles

Changes to Social Security login

If you use the My Social Security account online, you'll need to make several changes or you'll be locked out. If you haven't updated your account since Sept. 18, 2021, using the new method, the login for checking your Social Security account is no more and your username won't work. You'll now need to create a new account using one of their credential service providers at Login.gov.

Having access to your Social Security information can have several benefits, whether you currently receive benefits or not. You can get an estimate of future benefits, check on the status of your application or get a replacement card. You can confirm your earnings or get an SSA-1099 tax form. You can update your information such as address and either set up or change your direct deposit.

Security is one big reason they've made this change. You'll be using federal authentication standards that provide safe and secure online access.

To get started on creating your new My Social Security

account, go online to www.ssa.gov/myaccount. Scroll down to click the link to a 3-minute YouTube video that will give step-by-step instructions. (Beware: Below the video are links to several other videos, but only click on ones listed as the U.S. Social Security Administration.) Also take a look at the Frequently Asked Questions for more good information.

During the process of creating your account, you'll need to receive a call or text that will give you a special code to verify your identity. If you run into problems and can't access an activation code, you might need to receive your activation code by mail. Call for assistance at 800-772-1213, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. When the machine answers, say, "Help desk."

Each time you sign into your account, you'll be sent a one-time code for security as part of two-factor authentication.

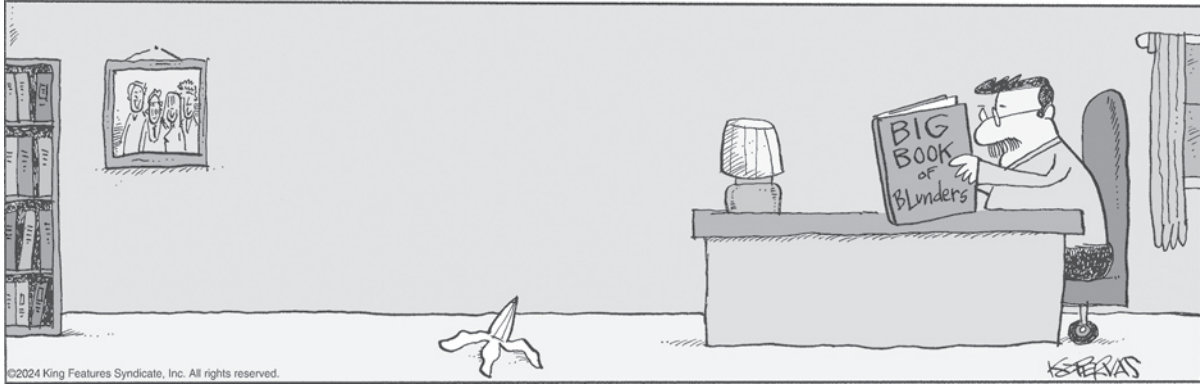
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Super Crossword

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108	109	110	111							112		113		114		115		116		
117							118				119		120		121		122	123	124	125
126					127	128			129			130			131	132				
133									134				135							
136									137				138							

Comix

OUT ON A LIMB By Gary Kopervas



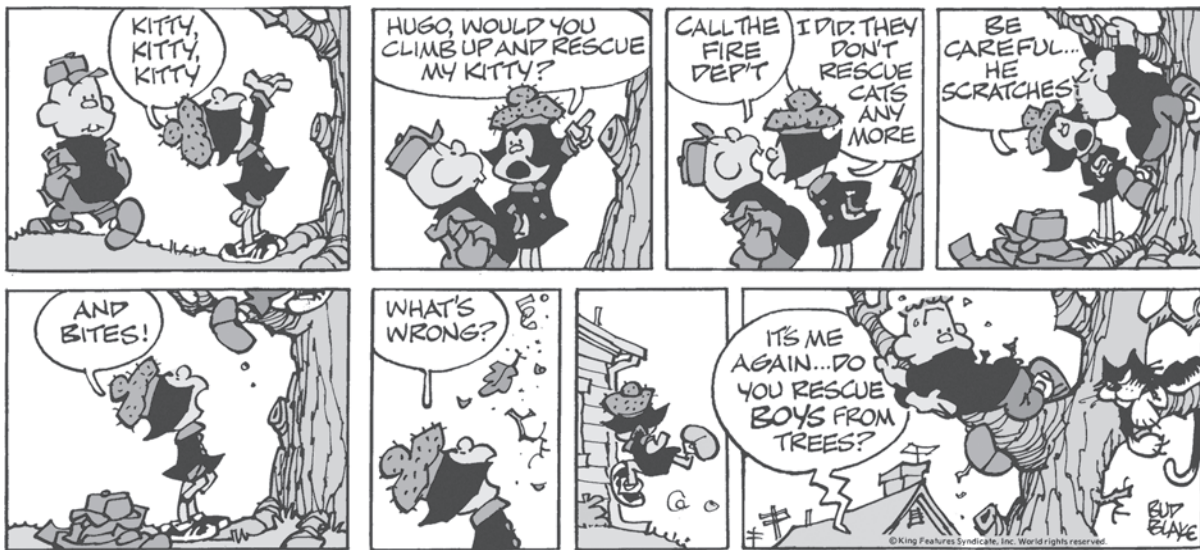
AMBER WAVES By Dave T. Phipps



THE SPATS By Jeff Pickering



TIGER By Bud Blake



Lowry

From Page 2

after he won the election, or any effort to get so-called faithless electors to keep him from assuming office.

There is no cloud of illegitimacy over his victory. He won more convincingly than in 2016, carrying the popular vote and denying his opponents the opportunity to say he only won via the technicality and anachronism of the Electoral College.

There has been no widely believed conspiracy theory – spun out of vaporous nonsense and hysteria – that his victory was the result of collusion with a hostile foreign power.

Relatedly, this time Trump doesn't have a bogus investigation hanging over his head. The Russiagate probe blighted the initial years of his first term. Now, the legal decks are clearing. Whereas Special Counsel Robert Mueller was about to enter the stage after Trump won in 2016, Special Counsel Jack Smith is exiting it. As Trump heads into the White House a second time, he is going to be less legally encumbered than he's been in years.

In 2016, Trump got elected despite a catastrophic unfavorable rating in the polling. This time, he was closer to a break-even favorable/unfavorable rating in some pre-election surveys, and he's ticked upward since. In a recent CBS poll, 59% of people said they approve of his transition. If in 2016 it felt like Trump faced a stiff headwind at the outset, this time he has the wind – or at least a pleasant breeze – at his back.

Trump is already looming much larger than the incumbent president who, with the exception of the pardon of his son, has nearly disappeared. When Biden shuffles into retirement, he won't, like Hillary Clinton, be complaining that Trump stole the election from him. If Biden is going to be bitter about anything, it will be about the machinations that denied him a Democratic nomination that he had already won.

None of this means that Trump is guaranteed success in the crucial first two years of his presidency. But the conditions favor him in a way they decidedly didn't eight years ago.

Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review. ©2025 by King Features Synd., Inc.

Antipsychotics can cause problematic weight gain

DEAR DR. ROACH: I was wondering whether Ozempic might be prescribed for somebody who gained weight due to antipsychotics or drugs for depression. I read some years ago that the weight gain associated with antipsychotics had something to do with blood sugar levels (or some other metabolic reason). – K.



You are quite right that many medications, including some antipsychotic and antidepressant medicines, are commonly associated with weight gain. There are many mechanisms at work here, but the blood sugar increase is probably secondary to the weight gain, rather than the other way around. Some medicines are worse than others, so a wise prescriber chooses the least-harmful option when possible. But sometimes the only medication that works for a mental health issue does cause weight gain.

For decades, psychiatrists and others have prescribed metformin to help with weight gain due to medications. It's certainly better than nothing, but you are right that semaglutide (Ozempic when prescribed for diagnosed diabetes and Wegovy when prescribed for weight loss) will be more effective. A 2023 study showed that semaglutide was effective for people who gained weight due to psychiatric drugs and did not respond to metformin.

Getting insurance companies to cover these expensive medications is often the biggest barrier.

DEAR DR. ROACH: You recently wrote about colitis, aka inflammation of the colon. Could you please explain how to treat and prevent it? – M.C.

“Colitis” does mean inflammation of the colon, but it isn't just one disease. It's a finding that is associated with many diseases, so treatment depends on the exact cause.

Colitis can be due to infection. Diseases like diverticulitis and gastroenteritis are inflammatory due to the presence of a pathogen. A pathogen is an unhealthy germ in the colon that leads to symptoms such as fever and diarrhea. Often these infections do not need antibiotics, just support until the body gets rid of the infection itself. Other infections are more serious, like Clostridioides difficile (“C. diff”), which is life-threatening and requires powerful treatment.

Microscopic colitis diseases are unusual and possibly autoimmune. They are sometimes triggered by medications and treated with anti-inflammatory medicines such as budesonide.

The underlying cause of inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's and ulcerative colitis) still isn't well-understood. Although anti-inflammatory medicines like steroids still form part of the treatment for IBD, current treatment uses biological agents to target molecules that form part of the disease response – without the long-term toxicity of steroids.

There are many other causes of colitis. Treatment is highly variable, and prevention isn't always possible. Still, a healthy diet with a large variety of foods, especially plants, will help keep your colon in the best shape to ward off infections. It's much easier to get an infection after antibiotics, for example, since the healthy bacteria are largely killed off.

I do not recommend probiotics in healthy people. Your microbiome – the “suite” of bacteria, viruses and other microbes that live in your gut – respond better to a good diet than a large number of limited bacteria. There is almost no evidence of benefit when it comes to probiotics in healthy people.

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. ©2025 North America Synd., Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Archives: www.wtxcc.com



Moore Texas by Roger Moore

January 1, 1819, Galveston Island: Jean Lafitte's pirates celebrate by writing "roasts" of each other.

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: H equals T

YH LFFPLXD LD HCATBC HCYD
 DHLBPZ DLHYXP CLD LMXPLZR
 GAUUPIGPZ. Y BTPDD Y'U
 MLHP HA HCP FLXAZR.

Answer Page 4

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Mistakes in PACT Act claims



by Freddy Groves

It seems that when there are new rules and regulations to be followed, the Department of Veterans Affairs often needs time to get caught up and understand new procedures. The Office of Inspector General for the VA investigated whether veterans were given the correct benefits after the PACT Act expanded eligibility for toxin exposure. The news isn't good. What the OIG found was that service-connected claims were improperly handled before they were denied.

Processing staff made several errors as they handled the claims. They asked for medical opinions to see if there were service connections even though the PACT Act clearly designated certain illnesses as service connected. Staff asked for exams that weren't warranted, which delayed the processing of claims.

Staff also made their decisions after examinations resulted in inconsistent results.

OIG investigators found that two veterans were denied \$56,700 in claims after their service connections were denied. The OIG discovered that there was \$1.4 million in costs (for a six-month period) for exams and medical opinions that weren't necessary and 870 potential benefits-related errors. It seems that staff didn't understand that presumptives don't need a medical opinion after it's already been established that a veteran was in a certain location at a certain time.

Mistakenly denying conditions covered under the PACT Act wasn't the only Act-related snarl. Under the PACT Act, survivors of service members who died in the line of duty or from service-related illness who'd had their expanded toxic exposure claims denied were allowed to refile and receive retroactive benefits. Survivors due benefits under Dependency and Indemnity Compensation didn't receive the correct payments when

they refiled.

The OIG investigated two groups of claims over a six-month period: those that were refiled and denied a second time and those that were refiled and approved. Processing staff didn't have a clear understanding of how to do the math, it seems, resulting in \$33 million of underpayments to survivors.

If you're filing under the PACT Act, keep an eye on what's going on – and ask a lot of questions.

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• "Save egg cartons for children's painting palettes. It's very easy to give kids a small amount of many colors, and they don't spread them out and run them together as quickly when they are each in their own cup. Plus, they are easy to carry." – O.L. in Utah

• Remove price tag residue off hard surfaces with hairspray. Or WD40 works well too.

• Make your own frozen dinners by purchasing divided trays and using them to store leftovers. Slip each into a plastic bag and label. On busy nights, you can take your favorite out and microwave it.

• "A beautiful but stained or worn tablecloth can find a new life at your dinner table. Cut into napkin sizes, and give any frayable ends a hemming." – A.S. in Oregon

• A great winter tip that's double purpose: After your dishwasher has done its job, open the door and let the dishes air dry rather than machine dry. You'll save on energy, while you add warmth and humidity to your home's air.

• Damp cloth plus baking soda should be your first weapon against stains in the kitchen and bathroom. It's eco-friendly, and a mild abrasive, which works without scratching!

Send your tips to Now Here's a Tip, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803. ©2025 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.

	+		-		=	8		
-		+		+				
	+		-		=	7		
÷		+		×				
	+		×		=	32		
=		=		=				
1		16		72				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

DIFFICULTY: ★★

★ Moderate ★★ Difficult

★★★ GO FIGURE!

Answer Page 4

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Weekly SUDOKU

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

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

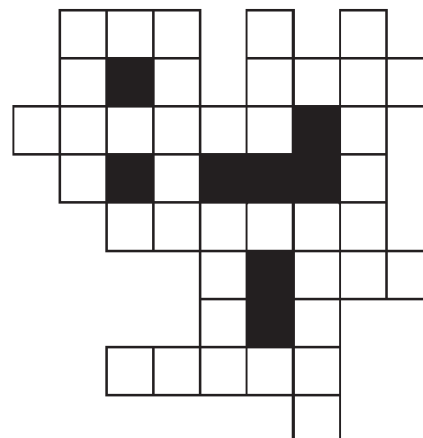
Answer Page 4

◆◆◆ HOO BOY!

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- PNE
- COPHON
- IDACT
- CAIP
- ♥ SEEDRI
- DOA
- ♥ EPDE
- ♥ PEDTO
- ♥ DSA
- PRACOT
- ♥ ARNEC
- ♥ HPSO



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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