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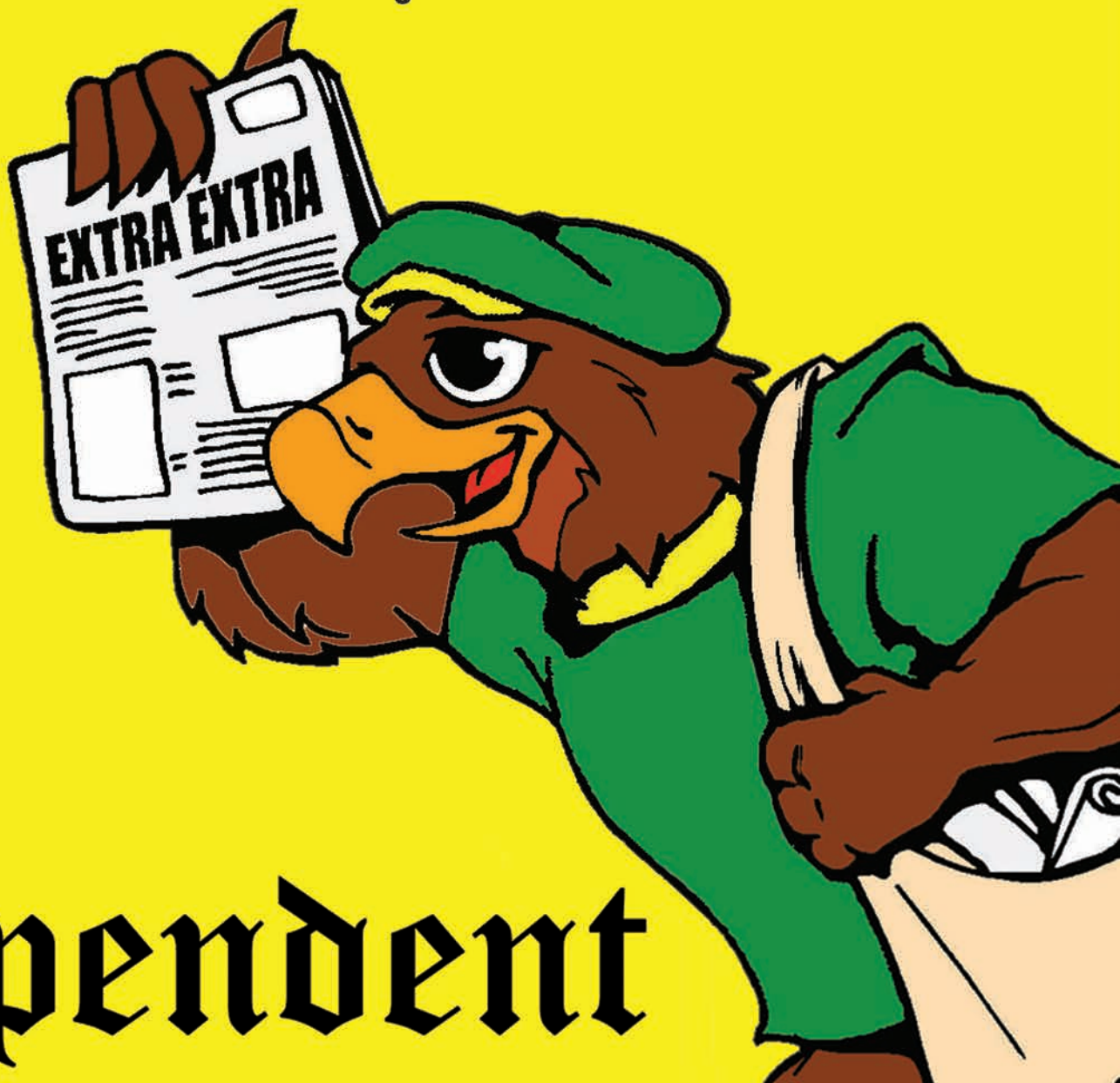
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50¢

Happy 20th Anniversary!

Keeping Southeast Madera County Informed for 20 Years



The Independent

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Happy 20th Anniversary!
Keeping Southeast Madera County Informed for 20 Years

The
Independent
By Randy Bailey

This December is very special for the Independent. It was December 2005 that we put out our first newspaper. I know it's getting to be a tired old joke, but hey — I only tell it once a year. Every December when I wake up and see I'm still putting out the Independent, I always think to myself, "... and they said it wouldn't last ..." For more emphasis I always say it very slowly, barely above a whisper, with my eyes squinted. The way I imagine Clint Eastwood would say it.

Twenty years ago, I had a business partner named Kim Allison and she and I had started a couponing magazine for Madera called the Super Clipper. That publication was added to an ag magazine we were producing that was seriously struggling. Although I had Walter Mitty delusions of being William Randolph Hurst, it can be hard to go for the gusto when you only have two publications and one is failing. It's like being a runner with a bad leg.

Our couponing magazine was doing well and one day while we were out selling ad space for it, someone told us that there was a newspaper for sale in the Ranchos. What they didn't tell me was how sick previous owner Bill Bell was from cancer. I bought the paper in December of 2005 and by the following St. Patrick's Day he was

gone.

I saw no need to fundamentally change the paper, other than computerize everything, and I stuck to my guns of only distributing to 93636, which we still do to this day — 100 percent distribution. Every mailbox gets the Independent."

In 2023 I made one big change. I changed the name from the Ranchos Independent to simply the Independent. When I bought the paper, the Ranchos was pretty much the only game in town out here, but that is not the case anymore. There was no Riverstone or Tesoro Viejo. It occurred to me that most people refer to the paper as "The Independent," so after 18 years I thought I'd get with the program.

We also added an internet presence — because hey, all the kids were doing it — at theranchos.com. You can go there and see every paper we've ever produced since April 2006. There's also a Facebook page at the Ranchos Independent if you want to check that out.

These last 20 years have been among the best in my life. The people I've met, the friends I've made have been awesome. I love being self-employed. It provides my second most favorite joke: "I love where I work, The only problem is my boss is an idiot."

Last year my wife and I celebrated 41 years of marriage. She was the first one to notice that in job situations, Randy didn't always "play well with others." It was pretty much self-employment or nothing.

But I wouldn't change a thing.

The best part of my job? I can do this when I'm 90 years old. As long as my brain keeps working, so can I.

See you over the next 20.

2025 • Top Ranchos Area Stories

from the pages of the Independent

1

Charlie Kirk Assassination/September • When an assassin's bullet ended the life of Charlie Kirk — for his ideas — it heralded a new dark time period where one of the fundamental elements of what it means to be an American, basically your right to have an opposing view, was under attack.

2

Newsom's Gerrymander/August • Although 40 percent of California's voters vote Republican, fewer than 17 percent of the Representative seats are Republican. That wasn't good enough for Governor Newsom, so along came Prop. 50 to get that remaining 17 percent as well.

3

Justice Dept. Joins Prop. 50 Lawsuit/October • Throwing some Federal weight into the ring, US Attorney General Pam Bondi announces that Newsom's attempt at gerrymandering California's remaining Republicans out of representation is not happening without a fight.

4

Puppy Shot, Left for Dead/June • The cruelty of some people is mind boggling. It's even worse when it's in our own backyard. A puppy — for whatever reason — was struck with birdshot repeatedly and left to die in the Ranchos. He was discovered and is recovering, but no suspects.

5

Distracted Driving/January • A Madera Unified school bus on Road 26 at Avenue 12 failed to yield the right of way as he crossed Avenue 12. This resulted in him pulling out in front of a Freightliner dump truck moving at illegal highway speeds. All preventable.

6

Tesoro Viejo Raid/October • A gang-related search warrant served at a home in Tesoro Viejo resulted in two arrests — a 35-year-old woman and a 15-year-old boy. Authorities say they were searching for illegal weapons, firearms and wanted fugitives.

7

Riverstone Robberies Solved/September • Riverstone was being plagued by a rash of unlocked vehicle burglaries, but with an arrest the burglaries stopped. The Sheriff's Office said the things stolen ranged from a firearm, a tool kit, a stereo, vehicle keys, mail and other property.

8

Madera Becomes 2nd Amend. Sanctuary/October • Across the nation, counties have adopted "Second Amendment Sanctuary" resolutions. District 1 Supervisor Jordan Wamhoff became alarmed by recent actions by Governor Newsom placing increasing restrictions on law-abiding gun owners.

9

New 357 Area Code/February • A new area code "overlay" was announced to be added to the 559 area code in March of 2025. No big deal, but it changed the dialing procedure for existing phone numbers. Now, ALL calls have to include the area code to make a call.

10

Madera County Noise Complaint/March • Noisy neighbor problem? Madera County has a new solution: Increasing penalties. The new law gives Madera County Sheriff's Deputies the ability to not only ticket offenders on the spot, they can now give out multiple tickets per night.

all stories can be found at

www.TheRanchos.com

Golden Valley Chamber of Commerce Happenings

The Golden Valley Chamber of Commerce celebrated its annual Christmas Mixer on Wednesday, Dec. 3 at the Chamber office in the Maywood Center. On hand were the current Board of Directors (picture to left) and other Chamber members. Annual elections are taking place now so make sure you get your vote in before the first of the year for your new Board. Call the Chamber at 559-645-4001 for more info.

On Friday, Dec. 6 was the Chamber of Commerce-sponsored the Community Christmas Tree Lighting. As a raffle prize, the Chamber gave away the fully decorated tree. The lucky winner was Sandy Allsup, but she donated it to Judith Equihua (pictured to right) and her family in the truest spirit of Christmas.

Happy Holidays from the Golden Valley Chamber of Commerce.

Kiwanis Korner

Ranchos Kiwanis Finishing Up 2025, Already Planning New Year Events for 2026

By Sally Rowden

We're into the wintery festive month of December. Lots of activities happening. The Kiwanis Club has been busy.

We enjoyed the Christmas Tree Lightening with the Chamber of Commerce on Friday, Dec. 6. It was chilly, though the hot chocolate and cookies helped diminish some of those chills. We observed and honored the Scouts handling the raising of the new flag for the Maywood Center. Then the arrival of the Station 19 Fire Engine with Santa completely chased those chills away. Santa welcomed each child and listened to their most desired Christmas wishes.

Our Christmas/Winter Raffle Basket was claimed by Steven Lewis. His winning ticket was drawn at our general meeting on Thursday, Dec. 11. Thank you, Steven, for your support. Do enjoy all the treasures packed into that holiday basket.

In the new year starting in January of 2026, we will begin our John Minney-Liberty High School-Scholarship Fundraiser. Letters encouraging monetary donations will be going out into our communities. All donations received will go toward scholarships awarded to qualifying seniors. We will have a Meet 'n Greet Evening where all donors can meet the deserving seniors. The awards take place in May 2026 at the end of the academic school year.

March of 2026 we will be servers at the Golden Valley Chamber of Commerce Crab Feed. As many of you know, this is a huge event for our communities. So, mark your calendars to attend on Friday, March 6. Be ready to enjoy a fun evening and as your servers, your generous tips will be much appreciated. All tips raised also go toward our John Minney-Liberty High School-Scholarship Fundraiser. Contact the Chamber Office at 559-645-4001 to purchase event tickets that are already available and suggested as excellent Christmas gifts.

That brings us to the Flatlander's Parade in May 2026. We're already in the planning stages to have a booth in the vendor section and a float in the parade. This event takes place on Saturday, May 16. Another date that needs to be highlighted on your calendars. Again, contact the Chamber Office at 559-645-4001 for any further information.

Once summer is here and over, we'll be into September of 2026. We have an exciting special event that will be happening. Much more information will follow. Be on the lookout for updates in the January Independent,

Our meeting site at Second Son Brews has come to an end. The venue room is closing. We will be searching for a new meeting site. Again, our January 2026 news article will have further information.

All the Kiwanis club members want to wish each of you and yours joyous holidays. I like what Norman

Wesley Brooks said: "Christmas is forever, not for just one day. For loving, sharing, giving, are not to put away."



The Sargent Family were on hand along with the Ranchos Kiwanis at the Community Christmas Tree Lighting sponsored by the Golden Valley Chamber of Commerce at the Maywood Center on Friday, Dec. 6. Santa Claus arrived via fire engine courtesy of Station 19 and got to enjoy hot cocoa and cookies with, from left, Kristyn, Matthew and Matt.



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Local Girls Shine in B-Ball League

By Courtney Forte

What started as a small local basketball league with just a handful of girls in 2023 has grown into one of the area's most respected youth Amateur Athletic Union programs. The Fury Elite Basketball Club has transformed from a small community team into a competitive organization where young athletes dream big — and play even bigger. Fury Elite Basketball Club inspires young athletes to aim high. Our mission is to inspire confidence, teamwork and perseverance in every player. We believe in lifting each other up, both on and off the court.

Fury Elite has quickly earned a reputation for its competitive spirit and supportive team environment. Players participate in local tournaments and community events, representing the values of teamwork and perseverance for which the club stands. Parents and community members also play a vital role in the club's success through volunteering and crowd support. "It's amazing to see the energy these girls bring to every game," said one parent. "A positive attitude is the key to winning on and off the court," said Priscilla Johnson.

Focused on developing skill, confidence and teamwork, Fury Elite provides

opportunities for girls to grow both on and off the court. The club's players, ranging in age from 8 to 18, train under wonderful, dedicated coaches who emphasize fundamentals, discipline and sportsmanship.

"We want the girls to be three people: the best person they can be; the best student they can be and; the best basketball player they can be," said Club director Joe Johnson. Johnson is also the head coach of Liberty High School varsity girls' basketball. Hailing from Colorado, Johnson has 25+ years of coaching and enjoys the small town feel that the Madera Ranchos gives. We are lucky to have him teaching and mentoring our girls.

Soon the sound of sneakers squeaking and basketballs bouncing will fill the local gym as the Fury Elite Basketball Club gears up for its 2026 spring season. The program travels to play other local teams and also hosts a tournament each season right here in the Ranchos.

Fury Elite Basketball Club is already looking forward to and preparing for its Spring season, with open registration scheduled for January. New players are encouraged to join and experience the program's positive, competitive atmosphere. For registration details and program information, visit www.FuryEliteBasketball.com or email furyelitebball@gmail.com.

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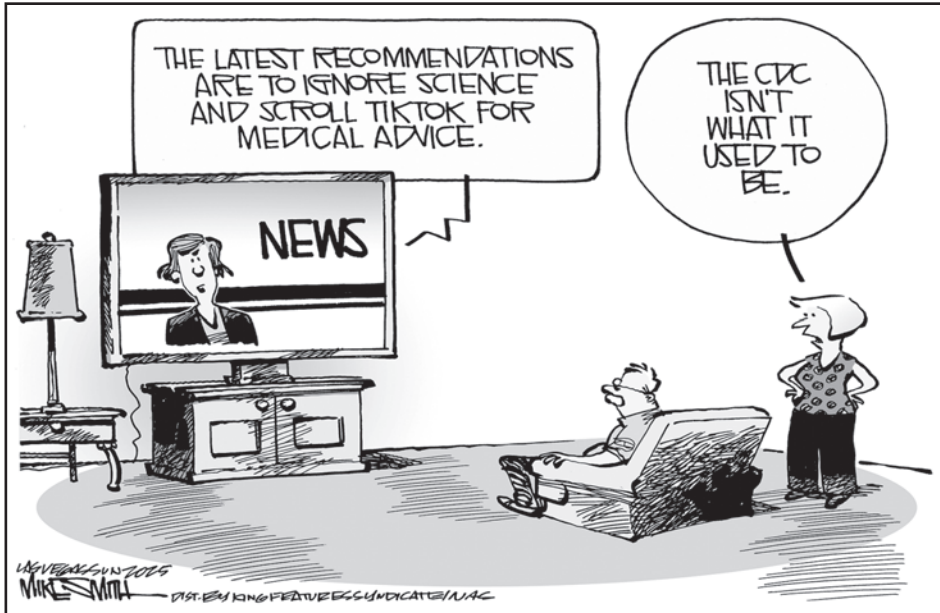
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Guest Editorial

Consider Yourself Warned

By David Tangipa

America, listen carefully. There is a man in California who presents himself as the embodiment of progressive elegance. Impeccable suits, polished rhetoric and a vision that sounds transformative until you look at the results. His name is Gavin Newsom. For eight years he has governed the Golden State with a style that puts spectacle ahead of substance. Now the rest of the country is being courted by his ambitions, and it falls to those of us who have watched this administration up close to sound the alarm: a Newsom presidency would be a fiscal and governance disaster of historic proportions.

This week the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office, or LAO, released its latest Fiscal Outlook. The numbers are brutal: an \$18 billion deficit in 2026-27 that widens to roughly \$35 billion in annual structural red ink starting in 2027-28. These are

not passing problems. They are the direct result of a governing philosophy that treats taxpayer dollars as unlimited and accountability as optional.

Consider the evidence.

California High-Speed Rail was sold as a world-class project: Los Angeles to San Francisco in under three hours for \$33 billion, finished around 2020. A great idea in theory. Why shouldn't the richest state in the richest nation have modern infrastructure? I

was 12 when voters approved it in 2008 and had no say in the matter. Today I'm 29. The price tag has exploded past \$135 billion, the timeline is a decade late, and not one mile of true high-speed track is running. What we have instead is a monument to mismanagement. Expensive, endless, and going precisely nowhere fast.

This week the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office, or LAO, released its latest Fiscal Outlook. The numbers are brutal: an \$18 billion deficit in 2026-27 that widens to roughly \$35 billion in annual structural red ink starting in 2027-28. These are not passing problems. They are the direct result of a governing philosophy that treats taxpayer dollars as unlimited and accountability as optional.

Then there is homelessness. Since Newsom took office, California has spent roughly \$36 billion trying to solve it. The result? More than 180,000 people on our streets. Over a third of the entire nation's homeless population. We didn't bend the curve; we broke the bank and made the crisis worse. That isn't compassion. That's incompetence in a caring mask.

And the bitter punchline: when you adjust for cost of living, California has the highest poverty rate in America. The wealthiest state in the wealthiest country has perfected the art of being extravagantly broke.

Every time reality bites, Governor Newsom reaches for the same playbook: eloquent deflections, blame shifted to Washington or "systemic" forces, followed by demands for more spending, more programs, more taxes. Always more. It's the political version of a guy who has maxed out every credit card insisting the answer is a higher limit.

Please see **EDITORIAL** on P. 12

The Independent

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Randy Bailey.....Publisher/Editor

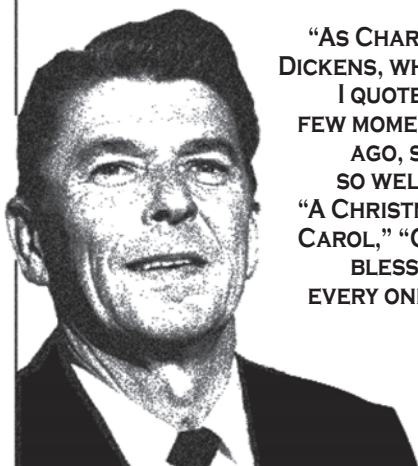
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"AS CHARLES DICKENS, WHOM I QUOTED A FEW MOMENTS AGO, SAID SO WELL IN 'A CHRISTMAS CAROL,' 'GOD BLESS US, EVERY ONE.'"

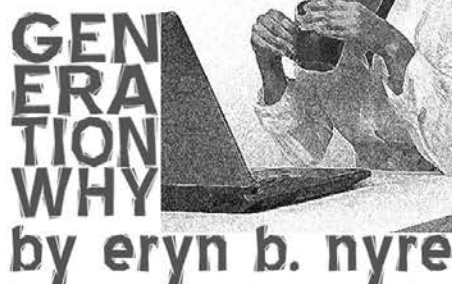
RONALD REAGAN
 SAYING MORE IN ONE QUOTE THAN OTHERS SAY IN A LIFETIME

The Magic that is Christmas

I think there is a beautiful juxtaposition that happens this time of year. The year is drawing to a close, and the darkness seems heavier as the night arrives earlier and lingers longer. The cold nudges us indoors, slows our pace, and invites a certain stillness. And yet, against the darkness, Christmas lights shine defiantly in neighborhoods with color shimmering off rooftops and dancing across the lawns while the soft glow of the Christmas tree brings warmth to the home. And there, in the midst of the cold and quiet, glistening between the light and color, is the feeling of hope. It's almost tangible as it hangs in the air. There is a shared longing that whatever storms, heartaches or hard lessons this year brought were not wasted but instead served as bridges leading us toward something better as the dawn of a new year breaks.

This season naturally invites reflection. When we take stock of the last 12 months, our perspective determines what we see. Some of us focus on the struggles, the disappointments, the unanswered prayers, the plans that didn't unfold the way we hoped. Others see growth, resilience, and quiet victories that might have gone unnoticed in the busyness of everyday life. The truth is, every year, like every season, is made up of both wins and losses. The wins encourage us. They affirm what of which we are capable, that progress is possible, and that joy can still be found because it exists there in every win. But the losses, those are often where the deepest growth happens. Loss forces us to pause and reflect. It reveals where we need to change, what we need to do differently, and how we might pivot moving forward. If we are willing to look honestly, loss becomes a teacher rather than just a wound.

I've always been pretty vocal about my love for Christmas. The lights, the music, the chill in the air; it all fills me with a sense of magic and wonder that brings me back to my childhood. There's something about this season that softens people. It encourages generosity and reflection, even if just for a moment. But more than the decorations and tradi-



tions, the best part of Christmas has always been the hope. The hope of a new year. The hope of fresh beginnings and unexpected blessings. The hope that the pain endured this year was not the end of the story, but a chapter preparing us for what comes next. Sometimes that hope feels calm and steady. Other times it is fragile, born out of exhaustion or desperation. Still, hope shows up, persistent and powerful, especially this time of year.

At its core, though, is that hope comes from something far deeper than twinkling lights or seasonal cheer. It comes from the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who entered a broken world to bring redemption, peace and salvation.

At its core, though, is that hope comes from something far deeper than twinkling lights or seasonal cheer. It comes from the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who entered a broken world to bring redemption, peace and salvation. The hope of Christmas is rooted in His love. Our hearts long for the peace that only He can give, not just in December, but every day of the year. His light reaches into the darkest corners of our lives. His peace steadies us in the middle of the storm. His presence sustains us when we are convinced nothing will ever change or get better. This time of year brings all of that into sharp focus as we gather with family, practice generosity, and intentionally place love and peace at the forefront of our lives. It's a reminder that this hope isn't seasonal or fragile, but steady and enduring, meant to carry us well beyond Christmas and into every day that follows.

So, this Christmas, allow yourself to fully embrace the season. Drive through neighborhoods and take in the lights. Let the glow remind you that light always finds a way to shine in the darkness. Listen to the music and let it stir nostalgia for simpler days, when joy

Please see **GEN WHY** on P. 7

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GEN WHY cont. from P. 6

felt effortless and wonder came easily. Drink cocoa by the fire. Sit quietly by the tree and let its warmth fill your home. Spend time with friends and family. Choose connection over distraction. Wrap yourself in love, laughter, and shared memories.

Above all, let your spirit be moved and your heart be open to hope. The same hope the Christ child brought with him into that humble manger. Invite Jesus in and allow Him to take root as one year gives way to the next. When we anchor ourselves in Him, even uncertainty loses its power to overwhelm us. The world will not always be dark, it will not always be

cold, and it will not always be lonely, because the Lord has come.

As this season draws to a close and a new year waits just beyond the horizon, may we carry this hope with us into our homes, our relationships, and the quiet moments when life feels uncertain. May we choose light when darkness feels close, generosity when it would be easier to retreat, and faith that better days lie ahead. The hope of Christmas does not fade when the decorations come down, it remains steady and sustaining, guiding us into whatever comes next.

Here's wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Hopeful New Year!



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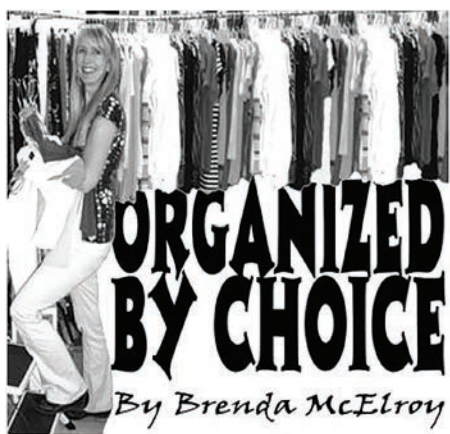
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12/25

Say you saw it in the Independent



*So, You Think
You're Unique?*

"Brenda?" called the nurse to welcome me in for my weekly allergy shots. I was surprised when two of us stood up. After seeking clarification, I waited for "Brenda M." to be called. I can count on one hand the Brendas I've known over the years.

Imagine my surprise when at the next visit a *different* Brenda and I shared the waiting room. And another new Brenda a couple weeks later. My favorite out of the three other Brendas is the little round-faced seven-year-old with bright red hair. She thought it was great that we shared a name and dramatically told me she was named after her grandma who had passed away but also had red hair like hers.

I thought my name was unusual — more unique. Turns out, in the context of my allergy office, it's not. Had I not heard the other Brendas' names called, I wouldn't have known what we share in common.

At the first session of the organizing class I teach, I ask the students to share what motivated them to attend. It's almost an audible collective sigh of relief as they hear others share their organizing challenges —

paper piles, cluttered bedrooms, walk-in closets you can't walk into, etc. Most think their challenge is unique when it's not.

During the holidays you might be invited to homes where it looks like "all is calm, all is bright." Chances are, it's not. Most of us experience an added challenge to stay organized with the extra décor, activities, food, gift wrap, visitors and gifts that accompany the holidays. Here are a few tips to ease the holiday challenge.

You're not alone. Remember that the unique ones are those who breeze through the holidays with flawless order. The rest of us experience challenges.

Let go of perfection. Don't allow social media to create your standard. Your guests may be relieved to find things aren't perfect at your place, since their homes aren't perfect either.

Remember that the unique ones are those who breeze through the holidays with flawless order. The rest of us experience challenges.

Focus on keeping common areas clear. You may need to stuff some things into an already cluttered closet, garage, or home office. Better to do

that than be stressed out by seeing it through the holidays.

Practice a 10-minute tidy. Before going to bed cruise through the common areas and tidy up.

Schedule post-holiday organizing sessions. Give yourself a deadline for packing and storing your holiday décor. Then, move on to those closets and catch-all rooms that helped keep your common areas clear.

Organize Your Paper, Space and Life Class. To jump-start the new year, consider signing up for my three-session class Feb. 3, 10 and 17. Visit www.clo-

Christmas Snacking

(December 2015)

Editor's Note: With the passing of Aunt Jean, I have decided to bring you a "Best Of" of her recipes over the past 10 years. Good recipes are timeless and I hope you enjoy them all over again.



Thanksgiving is over for another year, all the leftovers are gone and it is time to think about Christmas and New Year's. Will it be beef, ham, turkey or pork? I know a family that doesn't fix a big dinner on Christmas. After all the gifts are unwrapped, they fix a big breakfast and spend the afternoon visiting with family and friends that can't get out. Then it is sandwiches and snacks in the afternoon.

Someone was in the office the other day and said he was going to visit a family that doesn't cook dinner on Christmas and wanted to take a couple of snack food dishes with him. So I put on my thinking cap and came up with a few that I know and like. Be sure to take simple things, you don't have to be elaborate. I can remember as a kid my grandmother always having a bowl of sugared walnuts on the table. This is her recipe

Sugared Walnuts

- 1 C sugar
- 7 T milk

Boil 4 minutes and pour over 2 or 3 cups of walnuts. Pour onto a pan that has been covered with wax paper. Let cool and break into bite size pieces.

Or my mom would always have a bowl of almonds. You can do these two different ways, either with the hulls on or off the almonds. If you have kids, they can help you take the hulls off the almonds, however you will probably have almonds all over the kitchen as I remember we did. Put whatever amount of almonds you are going to toast in boiling water for just a minute or two and this will loosen the hulls. Put them in cool water so

they are easy to handle. With a gentle push the hull should come right off, or if the kids are "helping" they can squirt the almond meat out of the hull. Let the almonds dry completely.

In a frying pan, heat enough oil to cover the bottom of the pan. Pour in the dried almonds and stirring until they are browned and crisp. With a slotted spoon, remove almonds from pan onto paper towel lined baking sheet and sprinkle with salt while they are still hot.

One of my all-time favorites is the Seven Layer dip. I don't know why they call it seven layers because it is more than seven. When I make it, I usually use a large cookie sheet, but

you can use any flat plate or platter or cookie sheet, depending on the amount you want to make. The quantities in parentheses are the amount I use – you use whatever you need.

Seven Layer Dip

- Refried Beans (2 or 3 cans)
- Sour cream (small container)
- Guacamole (small container)
- Chopped Ortega chilies – Drained. (2 small

cans)
Lettuce – shredded (enough to cover)

Tomatoes – Chopped – (2 or 3, depending on size)

Green Onions – Chopped – (1 or 2 onions) Optional

Sliced Olives (1 or 2 of the little cans)

Cheese – Shredded – Cheddar, Mexican mix, or even pepper jack.

On your serving plate layer the beans, top with the sour cream, guacamole, sprinkle on the chilies, and then cover the layers with the lettuce. Sprinkle on the tomatoes, green

onions, olives and the cheese. Serve with tortilla chips.

My niece Rachael serves a dip that is yummy and usually goes fast.

Rachael's Spinach Dip

1 Box (10 oz.) frozen chopped spinach, cooked, cooled and squeezed dry.

1 container (16 oz.) Sour Cream

1 C mayonnaise

1 pkg. Knorr vegetable mix

2 or 3 ribs of celery, chopped

2 or 3 green onions chopped (optional)

1 loaf French bread

Combine all ingredients except bread and chill for at least 2 hours. Cut the top off the bread and hollow out, saving the cut out bread to use for dipping. When ready to serve, put chilled dip in hollowed bread loaf and serve with the reserved bread that has been cut into bite size pieces. When the dip is gone, cut up the "bowl" and eat it.

How about a tray of pinwheels – easy to make, and delicious

Pinwheels

1 (8 oz.) Pkg. cream cheese

1 (16 oz.) sour cream

1 pkg. ranch dip (dry)

1 lb. sliced deli meat (ham, turkey, beef)

8 large flour tortillas

In large bowl mix together cream cheese, sour cream, and dry ranch dip mix. Beat until smooth. Spread a thin layer of mix on each tortilla. Top with layer of deli meat. Roll each tortilla up tightly and wrap with plastic wrap. Refrigerate until ready to serve. When ready to serve, cut each roll into ¾- to 1-inch slices. Place on serving platter. Using a serrated knife is helpful.

If you don't want to go to the trouble of making an appetizer, go to the produce department and buy a variety of vegetables to be eaten raw – broccoli, carrots, celery, cucumber, zucchini and cherry tomatoes. While you are in the store, buy a can of black olives and a container of ranch dressing. Wash and slice the vegetables into serving sizes, place on a platter with the drained olives and pour the dressing into a bowl and you have a wonderful appetizer.

There you have some suggestions. Regardless of what you serve for dinner or snacks, I pray that each of you and your family have a blessed and Merry Christmas and the happiest and most prosperous New Year.

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Senior Report

Christmas Cheer and a New Year

By Melanie Williams

The chilly winter months of January are coming as we wrap up the Christmas season with family and friends. The New Year is just around the corner with a fresh, crisp wintry season ahead.

At the Christmas Potluck, we presented the new board members of the 2026-2027 Board to the seniors in attendance. Any member is welcome to attend board meetings on the second Monday of each month, to meet new board members or get more information about what we are planning for the Senior Center.

The California Fish Grill fundraiser is scheduled for Jan. 13. You can enjoy lunch or dinner at California Fish Grill and help the Ranchos/Hills Senior Center raise proceeds from the sales. For more information, please contact the Senior Center at 559-645-4864.

We are hosting a guest presentation at the Senior Center for the Alzheimer's Association on Jan. 23 at noon. The guest speaker will present the facts about the disease and what caretakers can do to support dementia patients and their loved ones. The presentation will include a time to answer questions and distribute materials that aid in the support of Alzheimer's patients. Any member of the community is welcome to join us at the Alzheimer's presentation on Jan. 23.

Madera Ranchos seniors are invited to start the new year at the Senior Center by joining the Senior Hot Lunch program. Any seniors, 60 years and older, living in the community or surrounding area, are encouraged to come and enjoy a hot meal and the company of your local senior community. Our partners in this program would like to expand this outreach to seniors who may not be getting out often, to come, enjoy a hearty hot lunch and visit with other seniors from the neighborhood. We are working with the Eastern Madera Recreation and Parks Department and the Fresno-Madera Agency on Aging to host this senior outreach program at the Ranchos/Hills Senior Center in the Madera Ranchos. You can join the Senior Hot Lunch any time, for additional information, please call the

Ranchos/Hills Senior Center at 559-645-4864 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

We are looking forward to fill the calendar with activities in 2026 at the Senior Center, so remember to mark your calendar with some important dates.

The Basket Weaving Class is on Tuesday, Jan. 6 from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. Terry Killingsworth volunteers to teach and guide the Basket Cases and members who wish to learn pine needle basketweaving. She is a true artisan of the technique and welcomes all new interested seniors of the community at her free classes at the Senior Center.

The new Line Dance Class is kickin' up its heels with instructor Jennifer Howe. Jennifer is very patient to clarify steps and review sequences at a pace that seniors can learn to line dance. We had a great group of novice line dancers join us in the last few months. The next

scheduled classes are Wednesday, Jan. 7 and Wednesday, Jan. 21 from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. All Line Dance Classes begin at 2 p.m. at the Ranchos/Hills Senior Center.

Monthly activities at the Senior Center include Exercise Class every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 10 a.m. with Jo Chase. Card and Table Games are on Thursdays starting at 12:15 p.m. during the chilly winter months. Come and join the senior group for an afternoon of card games every Thursday.

The Odd Fellows Breakfast is on Sunday, Jan. 18 from 7:30 a.m. to 11 a.m. They give the majority of their proceeds each month to different local charities in Madera County.

Brown Bag Day is on Wednesday, Jan. 21 from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Ranchos/Hills Senior Center.

The monthly Saturday Sale is cancelled for January 2026 because of the holidays. The Senior Center will be closed on Dec. 25 and 26 for the Christmas holidays. We will also be closed on Jan. 1 for New Years Day.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from the members of the Ranchos/Hills Senior Center. Thought for December: "Gifts of time and love are surely the basic ingredients of a truly Merry Christmas." — Peg Bracken

We are looking forward to fill the calendar with activities in 2026 at the Senior Center, so remember to mark your calendar with some important dates.

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The Golden Valley Chamber of Commerce would love to see you at our next meeting, Wednesday, January 14 at 6 p.m., 37167 Ave. 12 Suite 5C in the Maywood Center. Come join us and see what's going on in your community. Call us at 645-4001.

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ORGANIZE cont. from P. 7

visadulthoodeducation.com, or call 559-327-2800 for more information.

The message of Christmas also carries contrasting parts of commonality and uniqueness.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him, should not perish but

have eternal life.” (John 3:16)
We all share the need for a Savior, but God calls us individually to respond to the gift He gave — Jesus. May you and yours know the Savior and experience eternal life in Him.
Merry Christmas!

For more info, contact Organized By Choice at 559-871-3314 or email them at info@organizedbychoice.com.

EDITORIAL cont. from P. 5

This is not vision. This is vanity.
The LAO report is crystal clear: reserves are gutted, the gimmicks are used up, and California is living on borrowed time and borrowed money.
America, do not be seduced.
Gavin Newsom is the slickest salesman California has ever produced, but he is peddling a product that has already failed in the biggest laboratory available. Put him in the White House and he will simply nationalize California’s dysfunction: soaring deficits, bil-

lions flushed on vanity projects, and lectures about sacrifice from a government that refuses to make any itself.
We deserve better. You deserve better.
Do not hand this man the keys to the country’s future. The bill would be astronomical, and every American would end up holding it.
Consider yourself warned. Heed it.

David Tangipa is a member of the California State Assembly from the 8th District, representing Southeast Madera County.

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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.

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12/25

SEMCU speaks

By Anthony Forestiere

California Taxpayers Face Key Year-End Deadlines as 2025 Closes

As 2025 draws to a close, financial experts are urging California residents to take advantage of remaining opportunities to reduce both federal and state tax burdens. With unique state rules governing deductions, credits and income treatment, proactive planning before Dec. 31 may result in significant savings when taxpayers file returns in early 2026.

Retirement Contributions Still Offer Relief

Tax professionals say the simplest step Californians can take is to increase contributions to employer retirement plans such as 401(k), 403(b), and 457 ac-

counts. Contributions reduce federal taxable income and help offset the state's high marginal tax rates. Workers aged 50 and older can make additional catch-up contributions.

Capital Gains Hit Harder in California

Unlike federal law, California taxes all capital gains as ordinary income. Advisors say this makes year-end strategies such as selling losing investments — known as tax-loss harvesting — especially valuable.

Charitable Giving Remains a Powerful Tool

Californians who plan to itemize deductions may reduce taxable income through qualified charitable contributions. Donations of cash or appreciated stock made before Dec. 31 count toward 2025 deductions.

State Deduction Rules Differ from Federal Limits

California imposes no limit on state and local tax (SALT) deductions, making itemizing more beneficial for many taxpayers.

Withholding Adjustments Can Prevent April Surprises

Because California has one of the nation's most progressive income tax systems, year-end withholding adjustments can be crucial — especially for those receiving year-end bonuses.

HSA and FSA Rules Demand Attention

California does not conform to federal HSA tax benefits. FSAs remain useful, but balances must often be used before expiration.

Business Owners Face Additional Obligations

Small businesses may need to evaluate equipment purchases, payroll compliance, and the Pass-Through Entity (PTE) elective tax.

State Credits Can Reduce Liability

California residents may benefit from credits such as CalEITC, the Young Child Tax Credit, and clean-energy incentives.

Estate Planning Still Relevant Despite No State Estate Tax

Federal estate tax thresholds make year-end gifting strategies important even though California has no estate or inheritance tax.

Experts Encourage Early Preparation for Filing Season

Professionals recommend gathering property tax receipts, donation records and financial statements before year-end

for a smoother 2026 filing season.

Along with others, SEMCU is a non-profit organization that represents the interests of the residents, property owners and businesses in Southeastern Madera County. Its concerns, among other issues, are our community, safety, water, traffic, schools, future parks and energy. We invite community members to join SEMCU as board members to help shape the Southeast Madera County area and help make a difference for our families and youngsters. Together, we can build a stronger, more vibrant community.

SEMCU meets once per month for about an hour. You may join us online to virtually participate. To join online, go to www.semcu.org for a link and simple instructions. Or, if you prefer, you can call in on your cellphone at 669-900-6833 then enter the ID# 83632424343 followed with the access code 85422. Our next meeting is Tuesday, Jan. 20 at 6 p.m. "See you online" and make your voice heard!

*SEMCU is "By the Community,
For the Community"*

Cap and Trade Gets New Name and Can be Spent on *Anything*

By Dan Walters

Nineteen years ago, during Arnold Schwarzenegger's governorship, he and the Legislature created a program that would, in theory, reduce California's emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases deemed to affect the planet's climate. The plan, dubbed cap and trade, authorizes the California Air Resources Board to conduct quarterly auctions of emissions allowances which refineries, electric power generators and other industrial facilities purchase to offset their emissions. It's an alternative to actually reducing emissions or financing other projects to cut them.

Proceeds from the auctions have steadily increased and today run about \$5 billion a year, which the state is spending on climate-related projects, officials boast.

"The program's proceeds have funded nearly \$33 billion in investments across the state and cut carbon pollution equivalent to taking 1.3 million gas-powered cars off the road," Gov. Newsom's proposed 2025-26 budget declared.

The program is due to expire in 2030, and Newsom wanted the Legislature to extend it to 2045, the date when California is supposed to achieve carbon emission neutrality. Legislators balked at a simple ex-


tension and, instead, insisted on making some changes that tightened the number of emission allowances and gave lawmakers more authority over spending the revenues.

The program gained a new name, "cap-and-invest," which implies that, as the auction proceeds have reached multi-billion-dollar levels, politicians' chief focus for how the money is spent has changed from emissions reduction.

As a new report on the revisions from the Legislative Analyst's Office points out, cap-and-invest funds "can continue to be viewed as akin to tax revenues and be legally available to expend for any purpose." In other words, while the program is touted as financing emission-reducing programs, its billions in revenue can be spent on anything a governor and legislators want to finance.

The state's woebegone bullet train project has been receiving a quarter of auction revenues, roughly \$1 billion a year. But in the new version it will be guaranteed a flat \$1 billion a year to keep it alive — barely — as state officials try to scare up the many billions of dollars more needed for the bullet train to become a reality.

This article originally appeared at www.calmatters.org.



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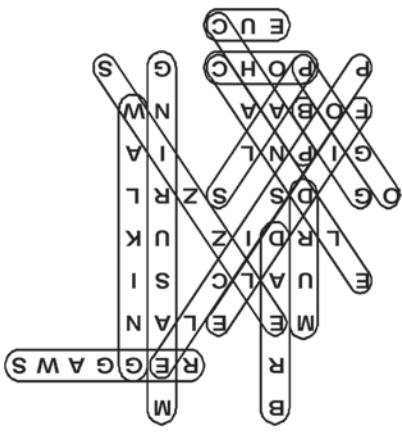
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Say you saw it in the Independent

Super Crossword

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- ### ACROSS

1 Small, sticky sheets
8 Sentimental souvenir
16 Bit of aquatic flora
20 In hitting position, in baseball
21 Haphazardly
22 Ringing thing
23 Providence university founded to educate Dracula?
25 Not phony
26 Auld lang —
27 Wed. preceder
28 Stale
29 Passover bread
30 Pixieish type
32 Nicer than a Madison university?
38 Actress Anderson
41 Jeans, e.g.
42 Ridden horse
43 Located on a Somerville university's campus?
46 Pooh or Yogi
48 Encyclopedia unit: Abbr.
50 Clueless
51 Cruise of film
52 Mine metals
- 54 Baseball Hall of Famer Tony
56 Some Siouan people
58 Shakur of hip-hop
62 LAX stats
64 Little — ("Hairspray" girl)
65 Certain till bill
66 Title of a picture album featuring an Atlanta university?
70 Paella veggie
71 Singer Abdul
72 Org. offering tows
73 Inadequate leader of a Durham university?
80 Easter meat
83 Santa — (desert winds)
84 Tart garnish
85 Italian actress Sophia
86 NFL coach Don or Mike
88 Fort Knox bar
90 — deck (cruise ship part)
92 Cup edge
94 Actress Lena
95 Loud noise
96 Mega melee
- 98 Unable to escape from a New York university?
103 Routine
105 Animals of a region
106 Pretenses
107 Houston university attended for four complete years?
112 Tattoo fluid
113 Make ecstatic
114 "Way cool!"
115 Tazo drink
117 "Intolerance" star Lillian
120 TV imp
121 Leave a New Haven university with no exit fee?
127 Kin of -trix
128 Able to do no wrong
129 Swiveled
130 Big name in private jets
131 Used a sieve on
132 Partner of Hutch
- ### DOWN

1 Alehouses
2 Nashville's Grand Ole —
3 Wall builder, e.g.
4 Moist wipe
5 "Son of," in Arabic names
6 Successor of Roosevelt
7 Malt brew
8 Kit — bar
9 Biblical verb ending
10 Sooner than, in verse
11 — Man (arcade game)
12 Hair nets
13 Past puberty
14 Organizing expert Marie
15 First-aid pro
16 Chafe
17 Golf great called "The Merry Mex"
18 Like many a bored person's eyes
19 Permit
24 Early car inits.
29 Subway system
31 Winter woe
33 Mil. missions
34 Fissure
35 The Yoko of "Dear Yoko"
36 "Beetle Bailey" dog
37 Troop gp.
38 Plane flier
- 39 "La, — to follow so"
40 Sternward
44 Dog in Oz
45 X-rated stuff
46 Actress Mary — Hurt
47 Actor Morales
49 Like loafers
53 Fix
55 Peru's capital
57 Went swiftly
59 Burst open, as corn
60 Lab gel
61 Very mean
63 Eye carefully
67 Lug
68 In addition
69 Gobbles up
70 Cali currency
73 Installed, as carpet
74 Totally wipe out
75 Document of English liberties
76 Metric mass, in brief
77 Give forth
78 Nixing mark
79 City in Oklahoma
80 Hawaiian dancers' garments
81 Wonderland girl
82 Long, thick heads of hair
- 87 Wishing to receive
89 Stale
91 Royal name of Norway
93 Sow or boar
97 Figure skater Midori
99 Arles assent
100 Wolf Blitz's channel
101 Chiang — -shek
102 Rapa — (Easter Island)
104 No longer ill
105 Hat for Frank Sinatra
107 Mutinous sort
108 Former senator Lott
109 Spiteful sort
110 Home for a 93-Down
111 Messy stacks
116 Dismounted
118 Search for
119 Lamarr of "Algiers"
121 Mil. enlistees
122 Mentalist Geller
123 Khaki cousin
124 Certain till bill
125 Bouquets-to-order co.
126 Mendes of "Hitch"

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• One of the best ways to eat less at a holiday party is to eat something small that is healthy and slightly filling before you head out. You'll make better decisions when you aren't starving, and save yourself a ton of calories. Here are more ways to keep holiday parties from blowing your calorie budget.



- "Going potluck? Bring your own healthy appetizer to the party. This way, you'll be certain to have at least one dish on which you can pig out. Go with cut vegetables and dip rather than bringing chips or bread. You can use the veggies to pair with other dips to save more calories." - A.R. in Texas
- Drinks are full of empty calories, whether they are cocktails or sugary sodas, so slow down and have water every other drink. When at the bar, ask for low-calorie mixers like soda water, not sugary juices, to whip up your cocktail.
- "How much wine is in your pour? Extra-large cups and free-flowing bottles can mean super-sized servings of vino. A serving of wine is 5 ounces. Here's a tip: Set your wine glass on the table. It will be easier to see how much is in your glass." -- Y.O. in New York
- You might be packing it on, but you can also burn it off. Commit to dancing every other song. Get your workout out of the way early so you feel great in the evening.
- "Walk away from the food table so you don't graze. Never sit at a table with bowls of anything parked in front of you. Work the room instead." -- A.A. in Florida

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

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THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE

...When they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense and myrrh.



Detail from "The Three Magi"
by Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1917)

MATTHEW 2:11

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SAY YOU SAW IT IN the Independent

Click on "Local News" at

Just Like Cats & Dogs by Dave T. Phipps

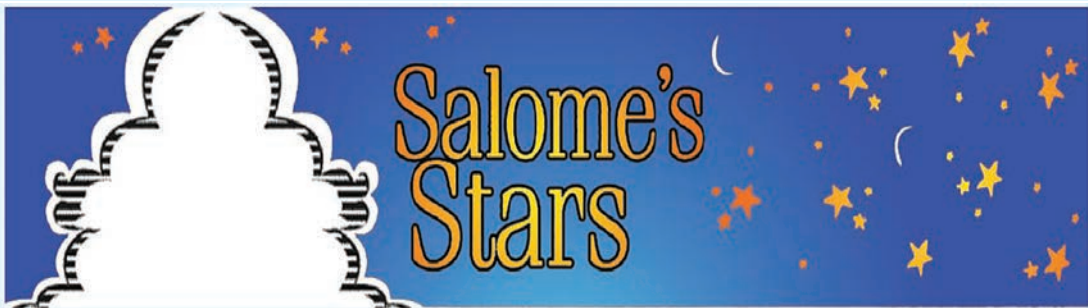




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“Could you manage a little less bah-humbug and a little more ho-ho-ho?”

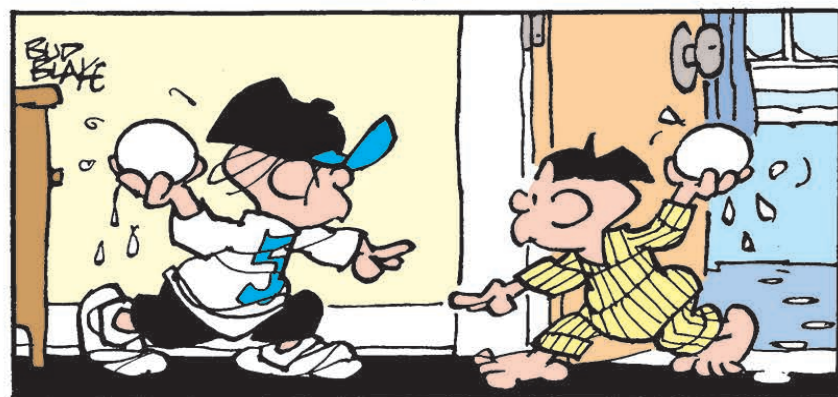


- ARIES** (March 21 to April 19) An old adversary wants to make amends over the Christmas holiday. The decision is yours. But wouldn't it be nice to share the upcoming new year with another friend?
- TAURUS** (April 20 to May 20) As news of your work gets around, expect to receive a special holiday "gift" from influential contacts who could help you launch your new projects in the new year.
- GEMINI** (May 21 to June 20) Instead of fussing over what you didn't do to prepare for the holidays, relax and enjoy the kudos for a job truly well done. A happy surprise awaits you early next year.
- CANCER** (June 21 to July 22) The best way to shake off lingering holiday blues is to join loved ones in the fun and festivities of this special time. A confusing situation starts to make sense in upcoming weeks.
- LEO** (July 23 to August 22) Special emotional rewards mark this holiday time for LEOs and LEOnas who are able to open up to new relationships and the possibilities they offer in the upcoming year.
- VIRGO** (August 23 to September 22) Your efforts to make the holidays especially memorable for some people will be rewarded in some unexpected (but very welcome) ways in the upcoming year.
- LIBRA** (September 23 to October 22) Be assured that your efforts to make this holiday special for everyone won't go unnoticed by those who could make some important changes in your life.
- SCORPIO** (October 23 to November 21) Lots of folks want you to light up their holiday parties. But try to take some quiet time 'twixt those glittering galas to spend with some very special people.
- SAGITTARIUS** (November 22 to December 21) While the current round of holiday revels has your social life on the fast track, someone special might want to keep pace with you next year as well.
- CAPRICORN** (December 22 to January 19) Enjoy all the fun you deserve at this holiday time. However, don't lose sight of the need to check out some of the changes the new year is expected to bring.
- AQUARIUS** (January 20 to February 18) What happens during this holiday time can help clear up some of the confusion jeopardizing a once-stable relationship. Follow your instincts on what to do next.
- PISCES** (February 19 to March 20) Your holidays are brightened by new friends eager to become part of your life. But don't forget to spend time with that one special person. (You know who.)

Born this Week

You have the ability to encourage people to reach their potential by setting an example with your own efforts.

by BUD BLAKE



- Click on “Local News” at

Amber Waves

MOM, MOM, IT'S SNOWING OUT! I'M GONNA GO PLAY OUTSIDE.

GEEZ, WHY DO MY GRANDPARENTS HATE WINTER? IF IT'S SO BAD WHY CALL IT A "WINTER WONDERLAND"?

ZIP!!

MAYBE BECAUSE RIGHT NOW I WONDER IF I BROKE SOMETHING?

by Dave T. Phipps

The Spats

OUR NEIGHBOR KISSES HIS WIFE EVERY MORNING.

"...WHY CAN'T YOU BE LIKE THAT?"

I DON'T KNOW HIS WIFE THAT WELL.

by Jeff Pickering

Out on a Limb

MY TAPE STICKS TO EVERYTHING BUT THE PAPER.

I ONCE USED A WHOLE ROLL OF PAPER TO WRAP A CANDLE.

SUPPORT GROUP FOR BAD GIFT WRAPPERS

by Gary Kopervas

HOCUS-FOCUS

BY HENRY BOLTINOFF

Find at least six differences in details between panels. Differences: 1. Mailbox is smaller. 2. Patch on sleeve is higher. 3. Mouth is open. 4. Roof is smaller. 5. Cap is different. 6. Mitten is missing.

FUN PAGES

SUDOKU

by Linda Thistle

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

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The Independent
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MAGIC MAZE • — STICK

S T P L I E B X U Q N J G D Z
W T Q N B K H D M A X U R P M
J G D A R X V R E G G A W S S
Q N K M E I E L A N F D A X V
T E Q U A L C H S I F O M J H
F C L R D I Z A U K Y W U R P
O G N D S L S Z R L J H F D B
Z G I P N L X V I A T R Q O M
K F O B A A I H N W F D B Z Y
W P V P O H C T G R S Q O N L
K I H F E U C D C A Z X W V U

Find the listed words in the diagram. They run in all directions forward, backward, up, down and diagonally. Unlisted clue hint: SCALY SWIMMERS

- Big Chop Measuring Swagger
- Bread Cue Pogo Swizzle
- Candle Drum Popsicle Walking
- Chap Fiddle Slap

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SEM CU
south east madera county united

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TO ALL**

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Our next meeting is online & by phone on Tuesday, January 20th at 6 p.m.

**Online: go to: WWW.SEMCU.ORG for the link
by phone: 669-900-6833**

& enter meeting ID#: 836 3242 4343, then access code 854 221

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