

The News - Banner

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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2024

BLUFFTON, INDIANA • Wells County's Hometown Connection

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County takes a look at Emergency Management Agency

By HOLLY GASKILL

A potential shake-up of the county's Emergency Management Agency may come with a significant compensation increase for its director.

During a Wells County Council meeting on Tuesday, member Seth Whicker asked the council to consider increasing compensation from roughly \$42,000 to approximately \$65,000 to remain competitive with neighboring counties. Because part of this amount is paid through federal grants, Whicker said the county's increase would be between \$16,000-\$18,000.

Whicker stated the county commissioners are in a "process of

evaluating EMA." Commissioner Blake Gerber, who was present for the council meeting, said the commissioners have four more interviews with candidates for the appointed director position, including director Rick Velasquez.

Whicker added that the compensation would also accommodate an increased workload as the commissioners hope to capitalize on more grant opportunities.

"Could be a current candidate, could be a different candidate," Whicker said. "But just to be able to say, 'OK, here's more that's going to be expected out of this job ... Because it's not going to

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Markle council raises employee salaries

By JONATHAN SNYDER

Markle Employee Salaries will be given a 5% increase, decided by the town council in a special meeting Wednesday.

Initially, a 3% increase was budgeted and introduced in the council's Nov. 20 meeting, but council member Blake Caley warned that 3% may not be enough to cover cost of living increases. Council member Matthew Doss described price increases as in a "weird state of flux" throughout the past five years, but his and the council's priority was to ensure the town keeps the employees they have.

"In my opinion, we have employees who are long long

term," Doss said. "How many times have you (Caley) seen where you have a workforce where 90% of them are (tenured) seven years or more? I think that we have to recognize that longevity."

"I think we've got the right employees," Caley said. "The cost of going out to recruit the level of talent that we have currently is way more than what our cost of living adjustment would be. I want to be a good caretaker of our citizens' tax dollars, but at the same time, we do not have a better investment than what we have in the staff right here."

Further investigation by Clerk-Treasurer Stephanie Hensley

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Gov.-elect Braun puts forth first-term agenda

By LESLIE BONILLA MUÑIZ
Indiana Capital Chronicle

Indiana Gov.-elect Mike Braun on Tuesday pitched his first policy agenda since his November electoral victory — largely reemphasizing his commitment to campaign promises.

Braun's "Freedom and Opportunity Agenda" focuses on tax relief, government efficiency, economic development, public health and quality of life factors like public safety, energy affordability and water cleanliness.

Taxes

A news release indicated Braun wants to bring "historic" tax relief to Indiana families.

"As Hoosiers contend with inflation, the State should provide comprehensive tax relief that protects taxpayers from runaway property taxes, supports retirees and families with targeted relief, and reduces the burden on Main Street businesses," it read.

The agenda includes limiting property tax increases 2%-3% annually and "resetting homeowner bills" to pre-pandemic levels.

But the state can't get too heavy-handed. It must abide by a decades-old ruling declaring Indiana's previous tax system, which wasn't based on the market,

unconstitutional.

Braun also wants to ditch state taxes on retirement income, establish farm savings accounts, change the formula used to assess farmland for property taxes, and introducing new sales tax holidays on things like back-to-school supplies.

Efficiencies

Braun leaned into his business roots in the agenda's second priority: efficiency.

"Unlike the private sector, where real economics incentivizes effectiveness and lower overhead, government at every level has grown unchecked," the agenda reads.

It goes on to suggest new performance metrics and trims of "unnecessary or underperforming" positions and programs. Indiana should also review its regulations to cut outdated requirements and lighten the load for agencies, it says.

Braun also hopes to get agencies digital: automate eligibility verification procedures for veteran health care, streamline document processing at the Bureau of Motor Vehicles and create a one-stop portal for farmer services.

He's already gotten started on

(Continued on Page 2)



When the river freezes over

With the first real cold snap of the season, ice has begun sprawling over the Wabash River. Pictured is the river from nearby Rotary Park. (Photo by Holly Gaskill)

Wells County innkeeper's tax shows a small decline this year

By HOLLY GASKILL

This year's innkeepers' tax collections have slightly declined compared to 2023.

In a quarterly report to the Wells County Council on Tuesday, Tourism Coordinator Audry Dudley said she hasn't observed a notable decline in overnight stays, but that local hotels and Airbnbs have lowered their prices. The innkeeper's tax, implemented in February 2023, places a 5% tax on overnight accommodations.

Wells County innkeeper's tax revenue shows a 4% decrease from January through September 2024 compared to February through September 2023. Dudley noted, however, that month-to-month trends have differed

between the two years.

Wells County collected \$95,268 through the tax in 2023, and \$71,188 through September of this year.

The Wells County Convention and Visitors Commission, which oversees the use of these funds for tourism, then met on Wednesday to discuss 2025 plans. This year, Dudley has put together visitor materials and maps for Ouabache State Park and downtown businesses, coordinated grants for local businesses and groups to market events, and digital marketing campaigns, among other projects.

In 2025, the Visitors Commission will continue working with Britton Marketing of Fort Wayne

to create marketing assets and advertise through social media. The board through the \$50,000 contract with Britton in August.

Dudley said the board may also reassess its budget for marketing grants in 2025 — \$16,653 was awarded to local groups in 2024.

No new board appointments are currently expected in 2025. Board members Justin Osborne, Jay Esparza, Steve Higgins, Scott Elzey, Brandy Fiechter, Michelle Blount and Zane Herr were present Wednesday; members Jon Winne and Jeff Reed were absent. The board will meet next at 8 a.m. on Jan. 8 at the Wells County Commerce and Visitors Centre.

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Two children wounded and gunman dead after shooting at California school

PALERMO, Calif. (AP) — Two children were wounded Wednesday in a shooting at a tiny religious K-8 school in Northern California and deputies arrived to find the gunman on the ground near the playground, dead after apparently shooting himself, sheriff's officials said.

The children, ages 5 and 6, were taken to nearby hospitals and their conditions were not immediately known, officials said. One was airlifted to a nearby hospital.

The shooting occurred shortly

after 1 p.m. at the Feather River School of Seventh-Day Adventists, a private school in Palermo with fewer than three dozen students. Palermo has about 5,500 people and is about 65 miles north of Sacramento.

It was the the latest among dozens of school shootings across the U.S. in recent years, including especially deadly ones in Newtown, Connecticut; Parkland, Florida; and Uvalde, Texas. The shootings have set off fervent debates about gun

control and frayed the nerves of parents whose children are growing up accustomed to doing active shooter drills in their classrooms.

But school shootings have done little to move the needle on national gun laws. Firearms were the leading cause of death among children in 2020 and 2021, according to KFF, a nonprofit that researches health care issues.

"My heart is breaking for everyone impacted by this tragedy,"

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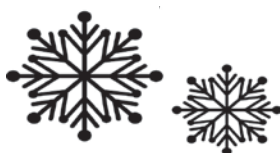
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Outside



Chance of snow showers and strong wind gusts

Today	Friday	Saturday
High 26	High 29	High 39
Low 17	Low 20	Low 29

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THURSDAY
December 5, 2024

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An evening with a Congressman

What questions would you ask a newly elected Congressman if you and a few close friends have a long evening of his undivided attention?

My monthly Socratic discussion group faced just this challenge recently as Third District Congressman Marlin Stutzman, an occasional participant in our group, met with us to discuss our post-election outlook on Congress, President Donald Trump and the nation.

We modified our semi-strict rules of engagement by allowing him about 15 minutes of introductory remarks before the questioning began. Truth be told, we couldn't contain our inquisitiveness for the whole 15 minutes as the questions queued up. That was fine with him, as he is familiar with our methodology of structured questions and answers.

Our group sees our annual federal deficit and mounting national debt as the existential issue for America, an apocalyptic event just waiting to happen. Is there any sense of urgency in Washington about a potential government default on debt service? Yes and no, apparently. Yes, in that any person of average intelligence knows that this can't go on indefinitely. But no, in that it will take a massive infusion of political courage to stand up and shout "Stop!"

The monkey is on the Republicans' back in that they won the trifecta on Nov. 5. With control of the White House, Senate and House of Representatives, they should be able to achieve their legislative priorities. Elon Musk and his Department of Governmental Efficiency generate daily headlines, but let's see what actually happens after January 20. Recall Trump's 2016 promise to drain the swamp. It appears to many out here in flyover land that the alligators are meaner and more numerous than ever.

We could have spent the whole two hours on this topic but there are other pressing issues that Congressman Stutzman and his colleagues must address. Artificial intelligence is a hot topic, perhaps the greatest unknown but one just begging for governmental attention, for good or for bad. China is high on the list as an economic antagonist and perhaps also a military one. Both of these topics were addressed by our group in the past year.

It was Vladimir Putin and the war in Ukraine that received the lion's share of our time. We had a special guest, a Marine who did four tours in Iraq and earned seven medals before being honorably discharged due to his many wounds.

It's easy for us armchair generals to propose strategies for thwarting Putin's designs on former Soviet republics now recognized as independent nations. Putin calls these breakaways as the "near abroad," a term loaded with menace. Putin, a 21st century Russian tsar, wants them reunited with Mother Russia. Restoring the Russian empire of Peter the Great and Joseph Stalin is very much alive in Putin's fevered brain. This is a classic case of what political scientists term irredentism, or an attitude of "we had it before and we want it back."

So how do we stop him? Encourage domestic opposition that results in a coup d'etat? Increase our support of Ukraine through weapons shipments? Involve NATO in a more formal manner, perhaps including the sending of combat units?

All of these ideas have rather significant downsides. Putin is essentially a dictator, able to suppress domestic opposition in a ruthless manner. Will more Western weapons systems or NATO troops push Putin to introduce nuclear weapons in response?

This was the point in time when we asked our Marine veteran guest to offer his opinion. To him the answer was simple: figure out how to work with Putin. A Marine who is risk averse? Yes, if you are a Marine who has seen the business end of war multiple times.

Sometimes, you just have to live for another day. Therein may lie the problem. We Americans just can't see beyond today. How many times have you heard superlatives used in describing current events? The most important election in our history! The most critical Supreme Court appointment ever! Climate change will end life as we know it! — it does get tiresome.

Marlin Stutzman participated fully in these discussions, answering our questions and asking his own. He clearly is prepared to engage these difficult issues in the new Congress. The obvious question for Stutzman, who served in Congress from 2010 to 2016, was why would he want to go back? There was a cynicism underlying this question. I should know; I asked it.

Stutzman replied he is more optimistic now than when he first went to D. C. in 2010. Seriously? Yes, due to his high opinion of the uniqueness of the American people in their ability to meet challenges. Then there is all the good the United States has done for the world at large, current woke wisdom aside.

Stutzman's optimism, not my cynicism, is what the country needs now in abundance.

Mark Franke, an adjunct scholar of the Indiana Policy Review, is formerly an associate vice chancellor at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne.

Today in History

By The Associated Press
Today is Thursday, Dec. 5, the 340th day of 2024. There are 26 days left in the year.

Today in history: On Dec. 5, 2013, Nelson Mandela, the anti-apartheid leader who became South Africa's first Black president, died at age 95.

Also on this date:

In 1848, in an address to Congress, President James K. Polk sparked the Gold Rush of '49 by confirming that gold had been discovered in California.

In 1933, national Prohibition came to an end as Utah became the 36th state to ratify the 21st Amendment to the Constitution, repealing the 18th Amendment.



Mark Franke

Hoosier Opinions



How Trump can end the war in Ukraine for good

As the bloodiest century in human history drew to a close, Americans looked back at the catastrophic mistakes that paved the way for World War II and the Cold War. Chief among them: the 1938 Munich agreement, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's misguided effort to appease Adolf Hitler, and the disastrous 1945 Yalta agreement that partitioned Europe and left the world teetering on the brink of nuclear Armageddon.

At the start of a hopeful new century came a new axiom of U.S. foreign policy: No more Munichs, no more Yaltas.

To which we must add: No more Budapests.

On Dec. 5, the world will mark the 30th anniversary of the Budapest Memorandum of Security Assurances, the disastrous agreement that paved the way to today's bloody war in Ukraine. As President-elect Donald Trump prepares to negotiate an end to that struggle, he should heed the lessons of Budapest — so he does not repeat them.

After the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Ukraine inherited nearly 2,000 nuclear weapons, along with intercontinental ballistic missiles and strategic bombers to deliver them — making it the world's third-largest nuclear power. So, in 1994, President Bill Clinton brokered an agreement among Russia, Ukraine, the United States and Britain in which Ukraine agreed to give up those weapons. In exchange, Russia pledged to "respect the independence and sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine" and to "refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine." Moscow also agreed to refrain from the "threat of aggression in which nuclear weapons are used." And the United States and Britain gave Ukraine security guarantees, promising "to provide assistance to Ukraine ... if Ukraine should become a victim of an act of aggression."

Those guarantees proved empty. In 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine and annexed Crimea, in direct violation of the pledges Russia made in Budapest. In the face of this aggression, President Barack Obama's administration failed to hold up the United States' end of the bargain, refusing to provide Ukraine with weapons to defend itself. Instead, out of fear that arming Ukraine would provoke Moscow, Obama offered Ukraine only nonlethal aid.

When Trump took office, he reversed Obama's policy of appeasement and became the first president to provide Kyiv with lethal aid. Trump also got tough on Putin in a host of other ways — imposing crippling sanctions on Moscow, expelling Russian diplomats, launching a cyberattack on Russia targeting St. Petersburg's Internet Research Agency, giving the green light for the U.S. military to take out hundreds of Wagner Group mercenaries



Marc Thiessen

in eastern Syria and persuading NATO members to increase their defense spending by \$400 billion. Result? Putin paused his aggression during Trump's term.

But after Joe Biden took office, Putin resumed his conquest of Ukraine. In the wake of Putin's 2022 full-scale invasion, Clinton acknowledged that the Budapest agreement he negotiated was to blame. "I feel a personal stake because I got them to agree to give up their nuclear weapons," Clinton told Irish broadcaster RTÉ. "None of them believe that Russia would have pulled this stunt if Ukraine still had their weapons."

What lessons can we learn from the failure of the Budapest accord?

First, Putin does not want peace; he wants Ukraine. He will violate any international agreement Russia signs to achieve his objective. The only way to stop him is to make his objective impossible to achieve. As we have seen, Putin believes he can wait out a strong U.S. president until another weak one replaces him. If allowed to do so, he simply will use a cessation of hostilities to pause, reconstitute his forces and resume his invasion when the time is right. If Trump wants a peace that outlasts his presidency, that agreement must create conditions that make a resumption of war impossible.

Second, Western security guarantees are worthless unless they are backed up with Western military might. A lasting peace will require that whatever agreement Trump negotiates creates defensible borders, with a demilitarized zone enforced by an international peacekeeping force (made up of European, not U.S., troops). Putin must understand that this agreement is final, and that if he ever tries to resume his invasion, he will not be fighting just Ukraine.

Third, Ukraine must be militarily strong enough to deter Russia. Giving up its nuclear deterrent, and depending on others to protect it, was a mistake. Ukraine will need to create a conventional deterrent so powerful that Russia will never take it on. This means that, even if Trump succeeds in forging peace, the imperative to arm Ukraine will continue. We must find mechanisms to increase the flow of U.S. weapons headed to Kyiv that do not require U.S. taxpayers to bear the cost.

If Trump wants to avoid presiding over a historic failure like Budapest, he needs to avoid the trap of trying to appease Putin with promises of Ukrainian neutrality and disarmament. He does not want to join Neville Chamberlain in the pantheon of leaders who promised peace in our time but delivered the opposite. Trump says he wants to prevent World War III. If that is the case, he should do what he did in his first term and secure peace through strength.

Follow Marc A. Thiessen on X, @marcthiessen.

Anticipation and Christmas preparations

Keeping the Daugherty tradition of Christmas pizza had become a bit of a problem. It began when Mom, aka Dorothy, fell and broke an arm. It rendered her unable to provide a meal for the multitude of kids and grandkids on the weekend prior to Christmas. Dad ordered TJ's pizza. Probably the largest pizza's ever made in the world. It took three to feed the clan. From then on it was expected. Desired. Called for. Delicious. Tradition.

Ordering pizza on Christmas Day created a problem. Buy frozen in advance? Reheat leftover local pizzeria pizza? Make one from scratch? Pillsbury pizza crust in a tube? Do they continue to sell Chef Boy-ardee Pizza's in a box like the 1960s? Pizza on a French baguette satisfies fillingly and unfailingly.

In 1899, Murray, Indiana, received a pre-Christmas surprise of, not pizza but Christmas fish for everyone. The Bible held a story of feeding the multitude with fish and bread. The Murrayites' smaller size multitude became just as grateful. Every inhabitant received their fill of fine pike, suckers, and bass.

"There were no carp in the lot." Hundreds of fish weighing in at "about a hundred pounds were caught in all, some of them of very fair size." The pre-Christmas Wabash River suddenly "thawed and immediately after the ice broke fish began running down the mill race above the dam. Evidently the fish were about frozen so they swam lazily on top of the water and a crowd lifted them out easily. What caused them to migrate in this style is a mystery, but Murray-

Angelkeep Journals

ites are not questioning the whys and wherefores. They are satisfied to eat the fish."

Craigville's Daugherty-home-made pizza often became a last minute evening decision. A meat topping depended on what the refrigerator held. Never pepperoni. Sometimes bologna. Hot dog chunks. Tuna. Yes, we actually ate tuna pizza.

The large Daugherty family invented the thinner-thinnest crust. One pizza mix was spread to all four edges of the largest cookie sheet. Chopped onion and celery always added bulk to the topping.

Extra cheese? Never. The only cheese came from the box mix's cellophane packet of dry grated parmesan which looked more like a light dusting of sawdust.

In adult years of stricter dieting, pizza had been produced with a thawed loaf of frozen bread spread as crust on a cookie sheet. Toppings included fresh spinach, celery for the great crunch factor, sliced olives, feta cheese, all placed over tomato sauce garnish with lots of oregano. A magical topper included dropped dobs-to-the-measure-in-globs of thick tomato paste.

With Angelkeep's children and grandchildren spread out to all corners of the United States, gifts were already prepared for mailing. Gifts purposely came predetermined as to



Alan Daugherty

having to fit inside a Christmas card. Gift card. Check. Cash. Today, Christmas cards have become nearly as rare as the feeding of fishes to the Murrayites' multitude.

When Murrayites raked in the holiday fish bonanza, Blufftonites were told to expect packages to arrive via the mail during the two-three days prior to Christmas Sunday. Postmen began looking like Santa with his overloaded bag of goodies. The post office gifted the mail carriers welcome relief by putting off package deliveries. Those items would be sent out on a wagon, not a sleigh, for delivery.

Christmas Day at Angelkeep will be a welcome, quiet, two-person celebration. It's become a tradition. One old couple, smuggled under a warm cover on the davenport (an old-school term,) watching new Christmas DVDs selected recently. Chosen together as a jointly-purchased Christmas gift for each other.

With Ma and her tea cup, and Pa with a hand in a large bowl of party mix, the celebration will be quiet. Blessedly quiet.

There will be pizza. However at this point in the pre-Christmas preparations, the type of pizza had yet to have been determined. As a last-minute option to keep tradition alive, the freezer contained a package of pizza rolls.

The pantry's stocked with Doritos triple cheese pizza, loaded pepperoni pizza, and pizza supreme flavoured chips. The last option always available: toast with Contadina Pizza Squeeze and tuna.

Mr. Daugherty is a Wells County resident who, along with his wife Gwen, enjoy their backyard and have named it "Angelkeep."

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Opinions expressed on this page do not necessarily represent the views of this newspaper.

Senioritis struggles: Fed up and counting down

Dear Annie by Annie Lane



Dear Annie: I'm a 17-year-old girl, and I will be turning 18 next month. I'm a senior in high school, and my grades are excellent!

college applications are in, so you can take this final semester to appreciate all the little things you DO enjoy about senior year.

And if you just can't help but dwell on the negative, recognize that learning how to cope with irritations and frustrations will be a necessary skill in college and beyond.

The fresh start you want is right around the corner, but how you end this chapter matters, too.

Dear Annie: I just read the letter about the woman who was with a man for three years, and then he was diagnosed with multiple myeloma.

My husband died of multiple myeloma. He suffered eight years with this cancer. There is no cure. Treatment only prolongs life with the cancer.

Maybe he ended the relationship because he knows this and is trying to spare her. She lost one husband; he doesn't want her to go through it again.

It just might be easier to recover from a bad break-up than it is another death. Believe me, I know. — Heartbreak

Dear Heartbreak: There is no greater pain than losing a loved one. Thank you for providing this alternative perspective for "In Shock."

"How Can I Forgive My Cheating Partner?" features favorite columns on marriage, infidelity, communication and reconciliation.

Dear Senioritis: Sounds like you're ready for green pastures — but don't be so quick to write off your high school.

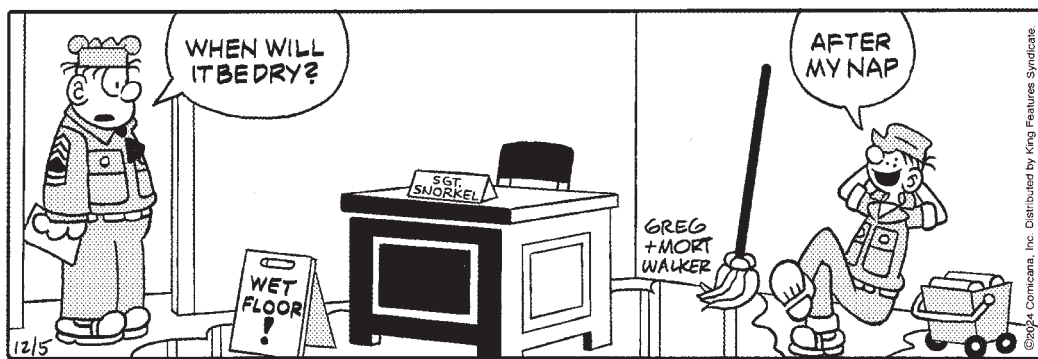
My problem is this: senioritis. Before I was a senior, I heard that senioritis is inevitable, and I also heard that it can result in a drop in grades, plus procrastination.

Let me give you some examples. The bus: we have a new bus driver and she's not reliable. One day, she didn't come and me and my neighbors had to wait 30 minutes for a substitute bus to come, plus, I had a math test first period!

Also, the other students: I have been having negative feelings toward my peers, and it resulted in me getting into a small argument with two of them in my ceramics class.

Dear Senioritis: Sounds like you're ready for green pastures — but don't be so quick to write off your high school. The pressure is easing off now that your

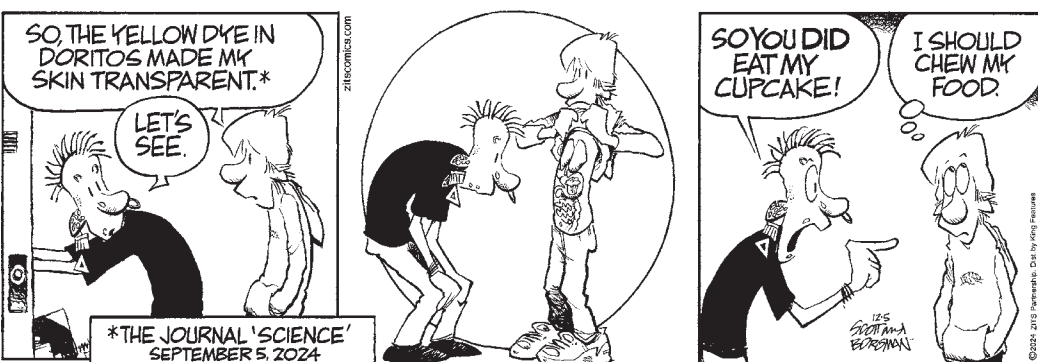
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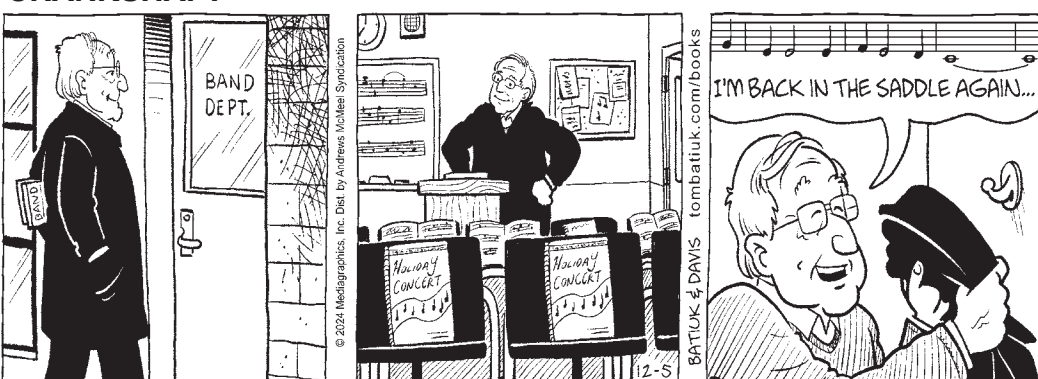
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My Answer

By Dr. Billy Graham



God will give us the strength to believe and trust in Him

Question: My heart breaks to watch the horrors of what is happening in Israel and the Arab states. I hear both sides cry for peace, but they've had little. Would they even know how to recognize peace? — S.P.

Answer: Peace carries with it the idea of unity, completeness, rest, ease and security. In the Old Testament, the word was shalom. The Jewish people greet others with shalom. Often, the Arab people use the word salam.

For centuries these people have known little peace. The Prophet Isaiah reminded God's people that God "will keep [them] in perfect peace (Isaiah 26:3, NKJV). How can this hap-

pen? By looking to the Prince of Peace, the Lord Himself.

Christians recognize that life is a spiritual battle. We know that while we are faced with troubles all around, our spirits don't have to be troubled, for God is in control.

God will give us the strength to believe and trust in Him, no one else; not political leaders, not even pastors and teachers, but Christ alone.

When we yield to worry, we deny our God the right to lead us in confidence

and peace. Only the Holy Spirit can give us peace in the midst of the storms of restlessness and despair. We should not grieve our Guide by indulging in worry or paying undue attention to self, or hoping in others we believe can fix what is wrong.

How do we begin yielding to worry? We must learn to trust Him each day — each moment; entrusting into God's hands our souls, and let our lips be filled with prayer and praise.

(This column is based on the words and writings of the late Rev. Billy Graham.)

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THE FAMILY CIRCUS

By Bil Keane



The LOCKHORNS



Table with 24 columns (12:05 to 12:30) and 24 rows (WIMM to TMC) listing TV channels and programs.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words.

Table with 11 columns and 11 rows showing crossword puzzle grid with numbers.

Raiders dismantle Owls for 8th victory, one more than last year's season total

By RYAN WALKER

It's only been nine games, but the Southern Wells Raiders have already topped their win total from last season.

The 63-28 blowout over Muncie Burris (1-6) at the Raider Dome Wednesday night tallied eight straight victories since the opening night loss to Northfield. The Raiders are 8-1 now after a 7-16 season a year ago.

In every victory this season, Southern Wells has won by over 10 points. The Indiana Coaches of Girls Sports Association ranked them No. 15 in 1A in their most recent poll. It's clear that the team has taken a ginormous step forward.

"I knew I had 10 or 12 girls that are varsity level players, and most schools our size don't have 10 that they can play, and so it's such an advantage," Southern Wells head coach Kyle Penrod said after the game. "And so that depth gives me an advantage that if somebody's not having their best night, I can still win. And a lot of teams that we play, if their best player has an off night, they're done for. That's one big advantage."

All 10 players that played meaningful minutes throughout the game had an impact at some point in different ways. Eight of the 10 scored, while all 10 tallied at least one rebound.

The defensive energy of playing a rotation of 10 players also helped, as the team forced Muncie Burris to concede possession 18 times.

Ashlie Needler (16) and Erika Beavans (11) put up double figures, while Kaylee Davis added nine on 3-4 shooting. Kaylea Coffel picked up six points, mostly in transition, while Kenzie Paxson went a perfect 4-4 down by the block.

The key for Penrod's group is the way they start. There's been a handful of times Penrod has seen a quarter or two fly by in a bit of a slump. Against the Owls, it was the exact opposite.

Needler hit the first two buckets of the

game for the Raiders and Davis got one of her own. That freed up Collena Reeves for a three and the points just kept falling.

Muncie Burris got its first shot to fall in the paint from Layiana ElDeeb. Since that bucket in the 7:02 mark, it was an almost six-minute dry spell.

Sydney Jackson got a pair of layups in for the Owls, but the spread was already 19-8.

In the next two quarters, the Raiders kept the energy and scored 18 points back-to-back and made the lead insurmountable.

In the third quarter, the team shot 8-9 and was perfect on the first six attempts.

"We got off to a good start," Penrod said. "That makes the defense flow in, and then when people come in, those good vibes are contagious."

The points and the defense was set up by the junior varsity contest when Southern Wells defeated Muncie Burris 30-0 in two quarters. Ellie DeWeese scored seven to lead the team, and Cadence Watkins, Lexi Pennington and Lillian Paxson scored six each.

Southern Wells will host Bluffton in ACAC play at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 7. ryan@news-banner.com

SOUTHERN WELLS 63, MUNCIE BURRIS 28

MUNCIE BURRIS (1-6): Sydney Jackson 7-19 22, Layiana ElDeeb 2-8 0-0 4, Ja Maria Jackson 1-5 0-0 2, Anna Murray 0-3 0-0 0, Grace Murray 0-6 0-0, Kylie Bernier 0-0 0-0 0, Lauren Richmond 0-1 0-0 0, Avery Johnson 0-1 0-0 0. TOTALS: 10-42 8-14 28.

SOUTHERN WELLS (8-1): Ashlie Needler 8-13 0-0 16, Erika Beavans 4-10 1-2 11, Kaylee Davis 3-4 2-2 9, Kenzie Paxson 4-4 0-2 8, Kaylea Coffel 3-5 0-0 6, Kyah Thomas 1-3 0-0 3, Remi Holmes 1-4 0-0 3, Cadence Watkins 1-2 0-0 2, Callie Ripperger 0-4 0-0 0, Aubree Meyer 0-0 0-0 0, Lillian Paxson 0-1 0-0 0. TOTALS: 27-55 3-8 63.

Muncie Burris 8 5 2 13 — 28
Southern Wells 19 18 18 8 — 63
Three-point Shooting: Muncie Burris 0-6 (S. Jackson 0-2, A. Murray 0-2, G. Murray 0-1, Johnson 0-1), Southern Wells 6-19 (Beavans 2-6, Reeves 1-4, Davis 1-1, Thomas 1-2, Holmes 1-3, Coffel 0-2, Ripperger 0-2). Rebounds: Muncie Burris 19 (J. Jackson 9, A. Murray 3, G. Murray 3, ElDeeb 2, S. Jackson 1, Richmond 1), Southern Wells 32 (Needler 8, Reeves 6, Thomas 4, Coffel 3, Ripperger 3, Davis 3, Beavans 2, Paxson 1, Meyer 1, Holmes 1). Turnovers: Muncie Burris 18, Southern Wells 12. Fouls: Muncie Burris 6, Southern Wells 9. Fouled out: None. Technicals: None. JV: 30-0 Southern Wells.



Southern Wells' defenders Kaylee Davis (left) and Callie Ripperger (right) swarm Muncie Burris' Anna Murray during the nonconference contest Wednesday night. The Raiders' defense led the way in a 63-28 victory over the Owls. (Photos by Ryan Walker)



Raiders' Collena Reeves (back) uses her wingspan to defend Owls' Layiana ElDeeb.

Tigers defeat Summit in two big hoops matches

Bluffton-Harrison Middle School got two big wins over Summit Middle School Wednesday night.

The eighth grade team picked up a 45-41 nail-biter to improve to 5-1 on the season. Chase Kistler led the team with 16 points and nine rebounds, Maddox White and Wyatt Holmes

(11), Vince Lambert (4) and Ethan Ribich (3).

The seventh grade team won 25-17 and also improved to 5-1 on the season. Davin Drayer led the team with nine points and had eight rebounds. Kreigh Ault and Riker Beste (6), Easton Schipper and Simeon Terry (2).

High School Calendar

- THURSDAY, DEC 5**
GIRLS BASKETBALL: Blackford at Bluffton, 7:30 p.m.
SWIMMING & DIVING (co-ed): Bishop Luers/Blackhawk at Bluffton, 5:30 p.m.; Leo at Norwell, 5:30 p.m.
WRESTLING: Bluffton at Wayne, 6 p.m.; Southern Wells at Tri-Central, 6:30 p.m.
- FRIDAY, DEC 6**
BOYS BASKETBALL: Bluffton at South Adams, 7:30 p.m.; Adams Central at Southern Wells, 7:30 p.m.
GIRLS BASKETBALL: Norwell at Huntington North, 7:30 p.m.
- SATURDAY, DEC 7**
BOYS BASKETBALL: Oak Hill at Norwell, 1:30 p.m.
GIRLS BASKETBALL: Bluffton at Southern Wells, 7:30 p.m.
WRESTLING: Norwell at Shamrock Duals, 9 a.m.

Day admits mistakes in Ohio State's loss to Michigan and looks to playoffs to redeem himself

By MITCH STACY
AP Sports Writer

Ohio State coach Ryan Day said Wednesday he was "in shock" after losing to rival Michigan for the fourth straight year and looks to the College Football Playoff as a chance to redeem himself and his team.

The calls to fire Day have been growing louder since Saturday's 13-10 loss to underdog Michigan, a team that just became bowl eligible the previous week.

What may be saving Day's job immediately is that Ohio State is No. 6 in the latest College Football Playoff rankings and will have a national playoff game, possibly at home, on Dec. 21 or 22. If the Buckeyes win a national championship, all will be forgiven.

"There's no way to defend losing four years in a row," Day said during his signing day news conference. "But I know this: We're going to play really hard in this game. We're going to swing as hard as we possibly can."

Day acknowledged what everyone who watched Saturday's game saw: The Buckeyes stayed with running plays that weren't working, pass protection was lousy, they faltered in the red zone and had special-teams problems, including two missed field goals by Jaden Fielding.

"I was in shock after the game, I really was," Day said.

"There were some things that happened in the game that, you know, I'm responsible for that can never happen again. I don't know how else to say it," he said. "And then other things that, you know, it's still a game of football. Certain things that are going to happen in the game affect the outcome. That's just how it goes."

To make matters worse, a postgame brawl started when jubilant Michigan players tried to plant their flag in the middle of the block O at midfield, raising the ire of Buckeyes players. Police had to use pepper spray to get the teams apart. The Big Ten Conference subsequently fined each school \$100,000.

The optics were bad for everyone concerned.

Despite all the outside noise, Day said everybody at the university has been behind him. Ohio State athletic director Ross Bjork expressed his "full support" for the coach.

"We got an opportunity to go win the national championship and, you know, everybody, around here has been very supportive on that, focusing on that," Day said. "And that's really what it is. And I know what the job is. I know where the focus needs to be. And there hasn't been a ton of communication other than that."

Construction of A's Las Vegas ballpark cost rises to \$1.75 billion

By MARK ANDERSON
AP Sports Writer

LAS VEGAS (AP) — The Athletics' move to southern Nevada is expected to take a major step forward Thursday when the 30-year lease, non-relocation and development documents are likely to be approved by the Las Vegas Stadium Authority following a rise in the estimated cost of the ballpark by \$250 million to \$1.75 billion.

Those agreements could be the last major hurdles before construction can begin in the spring on a Las Vegas Strip stadium projected to open for the start of the 2028 season, a ballpark in which underseat cooling is planned.

Steve Hill, president and CEO of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, has maintained for several months those items would be approved and didn't change his view this week. A backup meeting is scheduled for Dec. 12 in case the approval isn't finalized Thursday, but Hill said he anticipated canceling that second session.

"Obviously, our board still has an opportunity to review everything and ask questions," Hill said. "But we have been through drafts of all the outstanding documents at this point a number of times over a long period of time, and so I think the questions have been answered. I think we're ready to approve."



FORMULA 1
Abu Dhabi Grand Prix
Site: Yas Island, Abu Dhabi.
Schedule: Friday, practice, 4:30 a.m., and 8 a.m.; Saturday, practice, 5:30 a.m., and qualifying, 9 a.m.; Sunday, race, 8 a.m. (ESPN).
Track: Yas Marina Circuit.
Race distance: 58 laps, 190.253 miles.
Last race: Verstappen, already crowned the season champion for the fourth straight year, won in Qatar for his second victory in three races and ninth of the season.
Fast facts: Heading into the season finale, Verstappen has won 53 of 89 races in his championship seasons, or 59.6%. ... Verstappen can match Michael Schumacher's record of five straight F1 season titles (2000-04) by winning again next year. ... Verstappen joined Schumacher, Lewis Hamilton (2014-20), Sebastian Vettel (2010-13) and Juan Manuel Fangio (1954-57) as drivers with four straight championships. ... Esteban Ocon, 14th in the point standings, has been released by Alpine and Jack Doohan will replace him in the season finale, making his F1 debut.
Next race: March 16, Melbourne, Australia.

NASCAR Cup Series
Last race: Joey Logano led 107 laps to dominate the winner-take-all finale at Phoenix Raceway on Nov. 10, earning his third championship and completing a remarkable turnaround after initially missing the second-round cut before earning a reprieve with another driver's disqualification. Team Penske clinched its third motorsports crown in less than a month.
Next race: Feb. 16, 2025, Daytona Beach, Florida.

NASCAR Xfinity Series
Last race: Justin Allgaier took his first series title.
Next race: Feb. 15, 2025, Daytona Beach, Florida.

NASCAR Truck Series
Last race: Ty Majeski dominated from the pole in a Ford to earn his first championship, holding off playoff drivers Corey Heim and Christian Eckes in the 150-mile finale at Phoenix Raceway.
Next race: Feb. 14, 2025, Daytona Beach, Florida.

IndyCar
Last race: Alex Palou claimed his second consecutive IndyCar championship and third in four years at Nashville Superspeedway, where Colton Herta won the Music City Grand Prix for Andretti Global.
Next race: March 2, 2025, St. Petersburg, Florida.

NHRA Drag Racing
Last event: Drag racers ended their season in Pomona, California, with Antron Brown winning the Top Fuel title at the In-N-Out Burger NHRA Finals and taking his fourth world championship.
Next event: March 6-9, 2025, Gainesville, Florida.

World of Outlaws Sprint Cars
Last event: David Gravel won in Concord, North Carolina, on Nov. 7 and clinched the series crown a day later. Gravel finished fourth in the Nov. 8 race, which was enough to lock up the title.
Next race: Feb. 5-8, 2025, Barberville, Florida.

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Justice Department rules Memphis police use excessive force against Black people

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — The Memphis Police Department uses excessive force and discriminates against Black people, according to the findings of a U.S. Department of Justice investigation launched after the beating death of Tyre Nichols after a traffic stop in 2023.

A report released Wednesday marked the conclusion of the investigation that began six months after Nichols was kicked, punched and hit with a police baton as five officers tried to arrest him after he fled a traffic stop.

The report says that “Memphis police officers regularly violate the rights of the people they are sworn to serve.”

“The people of Memphis deserve a police department and city that protects their civil and constitutional rights, garners trust and keeps them safe,” Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division said in an emailed statement.

The city said in a letter released earlier Wednesday that it would not agree to negotiate federal oversight of its police department until it could review and challenge results of the investigation.

City officials had no immediate comment on the report but said they plan to hold a news conference Thursday after Justice Department officials hold their own news conference in Memphis on Thursday morning to address the findings.

Police video showed officers pepper spraying Nichols and hitting him with a Taser before he ran away from a traffic stop. Five officers chased down Nichols and kicked, punched and hit him with a police baton just steps from his home as he called out for his mother. The video showed the officers milling about, talking and laughing as Nichols struggled with his injuries.

Nichols died on Jan. 10, 2023, three days after the beating. The five officers — Tadarrius Bean, Demetrius Haley, Emmitt Martin, Desmond Mills Jr. and Justin Smith — were fired, charged in state court with murder, and indicted by a federal grand jury on civil rights and witness tampering charges.

Nichols was Black, as are the former officers. His death led to national protests, raised the volume on calls for police reforms in the U.S., and directed intense scrutiny towards the police department in Memphis, a majority Black city. The Memphis Police Department is more than 50 percent Black, and police chief Cerelyn “CJ” Davis is also Black.

The report specifically mentions the Nichols case, and it addresses the police department’s practice of using traffic stops to address violent crime. The police department has encouraged officers in specialized units, task forces, and on patrol to prioritize street enforcement, and officers and community members have described this approach as “saturation,” or flooding neighborhoods with traffic stops, the report said.

“This strategy involves frequent contact with the public and gives wide discretion to officers, which requires close supervision and clear rules to direct officers’ activity,” the report said. “But

MPD does not ensure that officers conduct themselves in a lawful manner.”

The report said prosecutors and judges told federal investigators that officers do not understand the constitutional limits on their authority. Officers stop and detain people without adequate justification, and they conduct invasive searches of people and cars, the report said.

“Black people in Memphis disproportionately experience these violations,” the report said. “MPD has never assessed its practices for evidence of discrimination. We found that officers treat Black people more harshly than white people who engage in similar conduct.”

The investigation found that Memphis officers resort to force likely to cause pain or injury “almost immediately in response to low-level, nonviolent offenses, even when people are not aggressive.”

The report says officers pepper sprayed, kicked and fired a Taser at an unarmed man with a mental illness who tried to take a \$2 soda from a gas station. By the end of an encounter outside the gas station, at least nine police cars and 12 officers had responded to the incident, for which the man served two days in jail for theft and disorderly conduct.

In a letter to the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division released earlier Wednesday, Memphis City Attorney Tanner George Gibson said the city had received a request from the DOJ to enter into an agreement that would require it to “negotiate a consent decree aimed at institutional police and emergency services.”

A consent decree is an agreement requiring reforms that are overseen by an independent monitor and are approved by a federal judge. The federal oversight can continue for years, and violations could result in fines paid by the city.

It remains to be seen what will happen to attempts to reach such agreements between cities and the Justice Department once President-elect Donald Trump returns to office and installs new department leadership. The Justice Department under the first Trump administration curtailed the use of consent decrees, and the Republican president-elect is expected to again radically reshape the department’s priorities around civil rights.

“Until the City has had the opportunity to review, analyze, and challenge the specific allegations that support your forthcoming findings report, the City cannot — and will not — agree to work toward or enter into a consent decree that will likely be in place for years to come and will cost the residents of Memphis hundreds of millions of dollars,” the letter said.

Memphis police never adopted policies and procedures to direct the unit, despite alarms that it was minimally supervised, according to the Justice Department report. Some prosecutors told department investigators that there were some “outrageous” inconsistencies between body camera footage and arrest reports, and if the cases went to trial, they would be “laughed out of court.” The report found that the unit’s misconduct led to dozens of criminal cases being dismissed.

Police hunt for UnitedHealthcare CEO’s masked killer after ‘brazen, targeted’ attack on NYC street

NEW YORK (AP) — A gunman killed UnitedHealthcare’s CEO on Wednesday in a “brazen, targeted attack” outside a Manhattan hotel where the health insurer was holding its investor conference, police said, setting off a massive search for the fleeing assailant hours before the annual Rockefeller Center Christmas tree lighting nearby.

Brian Thompson, 50, was shot around 6:45 a.m. as he walked alone to the New York Hilton Midtown from a nearby hotel, police said. The shooter appeared to be “lying in wait for several minutes” before approaching Thompson from behind and opening fire, New York City Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch said. Police had not yet established a motive.

“Many people passed the suspect, but he appeared to wait for his intended target,” Tisch said, adding that the shooting “does not appear to be a random act of violence.”

Surveillance video reviewed by investigators shows someone emerging from behind a parked car, pointing a gun at Thompson’s back, then firing multiple times from several feet away. The gunman continues firing, interrupted by a brief gun jam, as Thompson stumbles forward and falls

to the sidewalk. He then walks past Thompson and out of the frame.

“From watching the video, it does seem that he’s proficient in the use of firearms as he was able to clear the malfunctions pretty quickly,” NYPD Chief of Detectives Joseph Kenny said.

Thompson was shot at least once in the back and once in the calf, Tisch said.

The shooter, who wore a jacket, face mask and large backpack, fled through Midtown on foot before pedaling an electric bike into Central Park a few blocks away, police said. The assailant remained at large Wednesday afternoon, sparking a search that included police drones, helicopters and dogs.

Police issued a poster showing a surveillance image of the man pointing what appeared to be a gun and another image that appeared to show the same person on a bicycle. Minutes before the shooting, he stopped at a nearby Starbucks, according to additional surveillance photos released by police on Wednesday afternoon. They offered a reward of up to \$10,000 for information leading to an arrest and conviction.

Thompson’s wife, Paulette Thompson, told NBC

News that he told her “there were some people that had been threatening him.” She didn’t have details but suggested the threats may have involved issues with insurance coverage.

Eric Werner, the police chief in the Minneapolis suburb where Thompson lived, said his department had not received any reports of threats against the executive.

Investigators recovered several 9 mm shell casings from outside the hotel and a cellphone from the alleyway through which the shooter fled. They were also searching Thompson’s hotel room, interviewing his UnitedHealthcare colleagues and reviewing his social media, Kenny said.

Police initially said the shooter rode into Central Park on a bicycle from the city’s bike-share program, CitiBike. But a spokesperson for the program’s operator, Lyft, said police officials informed the company Wednesday afternoon that the bike was not from the CitiBike fleet.

Health care giant UnitedHealth Group was holding its annual meeting with investors to update Wall Street on the company’s direction and expectations for the coming year. The company ended the conference early in the wake of Thompson’s death.

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Public Sale Calendar

DECEMBER 5 & 6 - 9 a.m. - Secured creditors & various consignors, owners. 815 Adams, St., Decatur. Day 1: Online bidding only. Over 300+ lots including skid loader attachments, tool boxes, workbenches, iron gates, chains & binders, 1 trip 40' high side shipping container w/side doors, dome shelter containers, much more! Day 2 truck & equipment auction! Onsite and online bidding offering 600+ lots! Cars, SUV, 1/2 ton & 3/4 ton pickup trucks, cargo & passenger vans, dump trucks, large group of box trucks, day cabs, sleepers, utility trucks, bucket trucks, utility & semi trailers, SUV's pickup trucks, various skid steer attachments, much more! Accepting consignments! *Krueckeberg Auction & Realty LLC*, 260-724-7402, Kjauction.com.

DECEMBER 8-15 - 2 p.m. - (Online only personal property) - Thomas B. & Mary Lou Woodward, seller. 2016 JD 1025R diesel utility tractor, Frontier RT1149 tiller, 2016 Grasshopper zero turn mower, 2020 Club Car Carryall 1700, mowers, lawn & garden, patio furniture, antique & modern furniture, vintage framed art work, lithograph prints, vintage pickle castors, glassware, collectibles, more. Preview Dec. 8, 2-5 p.m., Dec. 12, 3-6 p.m., 301 N. Highland Ave., Ossian. Patrick Carter, sale manager, 260-824-3006, *The Steffen Group Inc.*, www.steffengrp.com, 260-824-3006.

DECEMBER 9 - 4 p.m. - 6 p.m. ET - (Online) - Crandall Farm, seller. Property location: Two miles northeast of Gas, IN, near intersection of E 300 S and S 550 E, Mill Township, Grant County. 81.59+/- total acres, tillable, woods, recreational land, potential building sites. Tract 1: 27.59+/- acres, 18.4+/- tillable, 8+/- woods, 1.19+/- non-tillable. Tract 2: 54+/- acres, 28.91+/- tillable, 23.34+/- woods, 1.75+/- non-tillable. Rick Johnloz, 260-827-8181, Emma Barr, 260-494-0992, Jason Johnloz, 260-273-9177, *Halderman Real Estate & Farm Management*, 800-424-2324, halderman.com.

DECEMBER 14-DECEMBER 21 - Bidding starts closing at 1 p.m. - Private collection, seller. 20 Marolf Ct., Fremont, IN. Extensive collection of exotic mounts (over 140) including zebras, black bears, antelope, water buffalo and more, antique boat motors, bows, hunting equipment, vintage fishing lures, watches and fine jewelry, tools, vintage nautical items, much more. *The Steffen Group Inc.*, www.steffengrp.com, 260-824-3006.

BIDDING CLOSES DECEMBER 15 - 6 p.m.

Online Only - Jim Baker, owner. AIRPLA-CO Pumpmaster MJ-16 concrete slab jacking pump system including pump, mixer and tandem trailer, concrete hole drill, Campbell Hausfeld stationary air compressor, smoker grill, handmade rustic furniture, beautiful antique furniture, Husqvarna garden tractor, 2 table saws, hand tools, power tools, building supplies, TV, modern furniture and much more! Preview Dec. 7, 9-10 a.m., 5388 SW. State Road 116-1, Bluffton, IN. Pick up Dec. 17, 12-6 p.m. Full list at Towncountry auctions.com, click Fliers. *Town and Country Auctioneers/Realtors*, 260-223-7352, *Shaw Real Estate & Auction, Inc.*, 260-824-2116.

DECEMBER 17 - 9 a.m.-6 p.m. - (Online Only) - Thomas B. & Mary Lou Woodward, seller. One of a kind picturesque real estate offering. Outstanding 4,014 SF on 8.45 acres, 4 bedroom, 3 bath home with a 2 car detached garage. Scenic backyard with multiple utility sheds and gazebo, Wells County. Open houses Dec. 8 from 2-5 p.m., and Dec. 12 from 3-6 p.m., 301 N. Highland Ave., Ossian, IN. Pat Carter, sale manager, 260-273-8294, *The Steffen Group Inc.*, www.steffengrp.com, 260-426-0633.

DECEMBER 22-DECEMBER 31 - Bidding starts closing at 2 p.m. - Estate of Richard Gerken and others, sellers. “Outstanding year end auction.” Very high quality art deco, mid century modern and Art Nouveau home furnishings, International Harvester collection, 2011 Platinum Ford F150 in pristine condition, 3,500 record albums, vintage Schwinn bicycles, advertising memorabilia, antique gas pump, country primitives and more. Open house Dec. 26 and Dec. 30 from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., 102 S. Jefferson St., Ossian, IN. *The Steffen Group Inc.*, 260-824-3006, steffengrp.com.

DECEMBER 29-JANUARY 5 - Bidding starts closing at 2 p.m. - The Estate of Eldrid Tinkel, seller. Large antique and collectible auction including country primitives, vintage farm toys, vintage toy trucks, early cast iron, brass cash register, large antique and rare collection of vintage graniteware, Fenton, Marion advertising, vintage beer signs, long guns, coins. Open house Dec. 29 from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. and Jan. 4 from 10 a.m. to noon, 1910 N Meridian St., Marion, IN. *The Steffen Group Inc.*, Steffengrp.com, 260-824-3006.

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