

The Dallas Morning News

Texas' Leading Newspaper

\$1.00

Dallas, Texas, Tuesday, December 25, 2012

dallasnews.com

Showers and storms



Metro, back page



Who had the biggest impact in 2012?

Houston's YES Prep charter school is a finalist for Texan of the Year after taking top national honors from the Broad Foundation. **22A**

ARTS & LIFE



'Les Misérables' worth the trip

Les Misérables is beautifully filmed, perfectly acted and emotionally devastating. Also reviewed: *Django Unchained* and *Parental Guidance*. **1E, 4E**

SPORTSDAY

Ex-Rangers owner Corbett dies at 75



Brad Corbett, who had a tumultuous run as the Rangers' owner from 1974

to 1980, has died at 75. **2C**

METRO

Report gives insight into 2011 slayings

A Grapevine police report documenting the deadliest crime in the city's history offers insight into the mind-set of the man who, dressed in a Santa suit, killed his family and then himself last year. **1B**

BUSINESS

Holiday sales may lift J.C. Penney

Analysts are divided over whether Plano-based J.C. Penney's holiday season has lifted the company out of a deteriorating sales trend. **1D**

WORLD

American killed by Afghan officer

A female police sergeant shot and killed a U.S. civilian adviser at police headquarters in Kabul, Afghan officials said. **15A**

NATION

U.S. to help fight African extremists

A U.S. Army brigade will begin sending small teams to help battle extremists in Africa. **6A**

INSIDE

Lottery	2A	Sports TV	2C
Texas	3A	Market Day	6D
Nation	6-7, 9A	Jumble	7D
World	15-16, 18A	Dear Abby	2E
Editorials	22A	Movies	2E
Viewpoints	23A	TV	9E
Reg. Roundup	2B	Comics	9-11E

©2012, The Dallas Morning News



CHRISTMAS

Snowplows? Not at this rate

Forecast calls for rain, sleet and only 'light dusting' of flakes

By **JAMES RAGLAND**
Staff Writer
jragland@dallasnews.com

Dallas can probably keep the snowplows in the garage — at least for now.

North Texas is bracing for a mix of Christmas Day precipitation, starting with rain and possibly ending with snow.

A thick blanket of flurries

probably isn't in the offing for Dallas, but a shroud of flakes may settle on some area landscapes Christmas night.

The underwhelming snow forecast probably will leave under wraps the snowplows that North Texas transportation officials have been gearing up to use since the winter of 2011.

The heaviest snow — 1 to 3 inches, if not slightly more —



File 2011/Staff Photo

The North Texas Tollway Authority added snowplows to its winter weather response equipment last year, but those blades probably won't be needed on Christmas.

likely will drift north of U.S. Highway 380 and along the Red River into Oklahoma, said Eric Martello, a senior meteorologist with the Na-

tional Weather Service in Fort Worth.

"It's a hard thing to pin-

See **COLD** Page 14A

Complete weather, **8B**

Strides and struggles



Tom Fox/Staff Photographer

Zach Thibodeaux, who turned 10 this month, stares into a strand of Christmas lights after an orientation and mobility training session. Zach, who is losing his eyesight, worked with his cane and used a blindfold in a recent session.

By **MARC RAMIREZ**
Staff Writer
mramirez@dallasnews.com

This is what life looks like on a typical morning: pulling onto the expressway with her notebook open in her lap, a pair of cellphones alternately called into duty, a half-eaten muffin at her side.

Johanna Uek was en route on this mid-December day to pick up her son, Zach Thibodeaux, a fourth-grader at Mary Immaculate Catholic School in Farmers Branch. Their goal: a 1 p.m. date at the offices of Reading and Radio

As Zach's journey continues and his sight fades, parents work to help him adjust

Resource in downtown Dallas, where radio host Donna Miller had invited them to discuss Zach's story on her weekly show, *Infotalk*.

Two years ago, Zach found out he had cone-rod dystrophy, an incurable eye disease gradually killing his retinas. Since then, he's made great

strides in his efforts to cope with imminent blindness.

In this holiday season, as much of the nation celebrates the historic birth of one child while grieving the recent loss in Connecticut of many more, Zach is an enduring reminder of the gift his own parents received a decade ago.

Earlier this month, he marked his 10th birthday at home with pals, presents and homemade pies, midway through his hardest school year yet.

He earns top grades. He stays upbeat. Though his parents are divorced, they've enabled his ongoing success, their duties magnified by the challenge of raising a special-needs child, fighting for his academic and social needs to prepare for his future in a visual world.

See **WORKING** Page 2A

Season of sorrow, hopes for tomorrow in Newtown

School shooting tragedy leaves touch on traditions for Connecticut families

FROM WIRE REPORTS

NEWTOWN, Conn. — The night Andrei Nikitchyuk came home after 20 young students had been killed at his son's school, he pulled out the family's Christmas tree.

Nikitchyuk and his wife, Erin, needed to create a distraction. Their youngest child, known as Bear, a third-grader at Sandy Hook Elementary School, had been carrying an at-

tendance sheet down a hallway as the gunman opened fire. A teacher pulled Bear into a classroom and saved his life. Three of his friends had died.

If there was ever a time for a little Christmas, his parents resolved, it was now.

The second thoughts came immediately. How could they celebrate the holidays when so many of their friends were suffering? Andrei became preoccupied with researching gun laws. Erin couldn't imagine

See **SEASON** Page 10A

FISCAL CLIFF

Likely budget options emerge

Four general scenarios range from no deal to the elusive big deal

FROM WIRE REPORTS

WASHINGTON — When President Barack Obama and Congress return to Washington later this week, the countdown to the fiscal cliff will be measured in days — yet no one really knows how, when or even whether an agreement might be reached.

Sorting out the scenarios is like trying to assemble a 100-piece puzzle on deadline. About the only decent bet is the one offered by Sen. Joe Lieberman, a Connecticut independent:

"We're going to spend New Year's Eve here, I believe," he told CNN on Sunday.

There are four general ways the drama is likely to unfold: no deal at all; the long-elusive big deal; consideration of legislation that one chamber already passed; or a small time-buying accord that would require further negotiations.

If no alternative is adopted, Bush-era income tax cuts will expire at the end of the year. On Jan. 2, about \$110 billion in automatic spending cuts would take effect, and half of them would involve defense.

Those are just the big items, however.

Extended unemployment benefits for an estimated 2.1 million Americans begin ex-

See **LIKELY** Page 4A

McKINNEY

6 children burned in blast

Gas can explodes as 4- to 11-year-olds play near backyard fire pit

By **MICHAEL E. YOUNG**
Staff Writer
myoung@dallasnews.com

McKINNEY — Six children — ages 4 to 11 — were burned Monday afternoon when a gasoline can near a fire pit exploded in a backyard, authorities said.

All six were expected to survive, though two were in the critical care burn unit at Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas.

"I believe we are going to be very blessed," said Stacie Durham, a McKinney Fire Department spokeswoman. "My understanding is that most of them had their backs to it, so they didn't inhale the flames, causing injuries to the lungs."

She said all of the children were related — either siblings or cousins.

There were adults in the house but not in the yard, where the children were play-

See **GAS CAN** Page 5A

NATION

Holiday absence is still a fact of life for nation's military families. **7A**

WORLD

United spirit fills holy land. **16A**

EDITORIAL

"Christmas Day's paradox," **22A**

VIEWPOINTS

Paul Crume's timeless essay about the angels among us, **23A**

METRO

Jacquielynn Floyd: Give yourself the gift of peace and quiet. **1B**

Homeless get red-carpet treatment. **6B**

BUSINESS

Last-minute shoppers are rewarded with big bargains. **1D**

Working on a path to independence

Continued from Page 1A

But as he grows up, there are emotional needs, too. They've helped him confront the tough questions he asks as his window to the world closes: *Why me? Why is this happening?*

"He just doesn't know why," Uek said. "He gets sad. He really wishes he could read and play sports with his friends."

She and Zach's father, Adam Thibodeaux, have each strived to bolster their son's esteem, even as they face their own fears and doubts, hectic schedules and the needs of their other kids.

As they help Zach through bouts of isolation or insecurity, they're readying him for the day he'll have to get by on his own.

"Even though I treat him like a little boy, I have to strengthen him up," Uek said. "Because I'm not always going to be there."

Thibodeaux, a digital strategist for J.C. Penney Co., straddles a tough-love line, aiming to get Zach to think critically, to develop street smarts and discipline. For example, he's taught his son to put his shoes in the same spot nightly so he can find them in the morning. But sometimes Zach forgets.

"He'll be, like, 'Dad, do you know where my shoes are?'" Thibodeaux said. "I say, 'No, I don't.' And I let him struggle for a bit until we have to go. Life is a strong teacher."

"I have the same goals for Zach as any of my children. I want him to be a good, contributing adult, to make others' lives better, to follow the path God sees fit. I've got to help him become a man."

First, she wants to make a stop: The chocolate bars Uek custom-ordered from a Plano chocolatier with Brailled holiday messages molded on the back are ready. It's almost noon.

"I think we can still make it," she said.

It's the suburban SUV mom routine — running among her Lewisville home, Zach's school in Farmers Branch, her part-time job selling cosmetics at Neiman Marcus in Dallas with assorted errands in between.

But always, Zach, his older brother Josh and stepbrother Connor are foremost on her mind.

The other boys need attention, too. It's not easy. And one night, when Zach was eager to play a knowledge game he'd gotten, he had no one to read him the questions. His stepdad was busy, his brother was researching colleges, and Uek



Donna Miller (left) of Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind interviewed Zach Thibodeaux and his mother, Johanna Uek, at Reading and Radio Resource in Dallas this month.



Tom Fox/Staff Photographer



Tom Fox/Staff Photographer

Left: After not being able to find the milk section of the grocery store in a recent outing, Zach asked for help from store employee Collin Mungu. **Above:** Zach leans in close so he can see the small fish he purchased at an Addison pet store with his father, Adam Thibodeaux.

was cooking dinner. "He was like, 'Hey, I need somebody!'" Uek said. "But by the time we were done, it was time to put him to bed. His time is so limited."

"I just want to be there for him more than I am."

Zach talks of pursuing a science career, and Uek's goal is to get him into Jesuit College Preparatory School. Among the concerns that flood her mind are the costs of his Braille and cane-mobility classes and translation of his textbooks and tests into Braille, which ran nearly \$5,000 this year alone.

While many services and textbooks would be given in public school for free, she and Thibodeaux opted to keep Zach at Mary Immaculate — in the building, and in the community, that he already knew.

That has created challenges, with tangles over government aid, for instance, if the Catholic school's books aren't state-adopted. Sometimes, because Uek has to order them herself, the books arrive late. Now and

then she wonders why it has to be so difficult.

"If my son wasn't going blind, he'd be able to get the education he needs, and no one would be fighting about it," she said in one frustrated moment earlier this year. "If my son wants to be a chemist, I want him to be able to."

"He should have the right to decide. He's not asking to be a rapper. He's asking to be a chemist or an engineer. I need these materials so when he goes to high school he'll be able to keep up."

Back to mid-December: in the car, on her way to Plano. Uek had finished three phone calls by the time she reached The Shops at Legacy, with another coming in as she parked. The chocolatier showed her the bars. She checked the design. All good. She paid up and hit the road to Farmers Branch.

On the phone again: "Hi, this is Johanna Uek. I'm picking up Zach Thibodeaux. I'll be there in five minutes. Can you have him wait in the office?"

She hung up. "We're going to be cutting it close," she said.

It's nearly 12:45 by the time Zach exits with his cane and backpack, the skies spilling rain. One more phone call to radio host Miller, informing her of the delay.

"I knew I should have done the candy later," she lamented. "I just wanted to bring Donna a candy bar."

Every week, Zach works on his cane skills, part of his path to independence. Crossing busy streets: that's the challenge his parents worry about most.

"It's not that I don't trust him," Uek said. "I'm worried about that driver that's not paying attention. ... The hardest thing for me to do is let go."

Earlier this month, Zach was at his dad's home in Addison, where mobility teacher Rhonda Miller prepared to direct them on a trek to the adjacent shopping plaza.

First, they would go to the pet store, where Zach wanted to buy a fish. On the way, he'd fo-

ABOUT THE SERIES

Ten-year-old Zach Thibodeaux is going blind, the result of a condition called cone-rod dystrophy, a degenerative disease for which there is no cure. In "Zach's Journey," staff writer Marc Ramirez and our photographers are chronicling the Lewisville boy's passage into darkness.

READ Zach's full story in our e-book *Zach's Journey*, available for all e-readers. dallasnews.com/ebooks
READ previous installments of the series. dallasnews.com/zachsjourney

mostly blind. Then the man told Zach, "We're glad you're out here. You're doing a really good job."

Such interactions are good for Zach, Thibodeaux said, as he learns to believe in himself.

It's hard, though, for Zach not to feel left out when other kids play video games or when former soccer teammates take the field, hard not to pout when friends laugh at something he cannot see.

Whining, his dad warns, will only make his friends uncomfortable and less likely to come over. Instead, Zach needs to learn to ask: "Hey, what were you guys laughing at?"

It's those difficult truths Thibodeaux vows to deliver.

"That's a hard thing for a kid that age to hear," he said. "But he needs to know I have his best interests in mind."

Mom, are you going to love my brothers more than me? Do other people think they're better because they can see?

Why would you think that? Because no one would ever want to be blind like me.

No, Zach. You are special. You will know things other people don't because you are blind.

He doesn't like it when people feel sorry for him; neither does she.

"He is more than just blind," Uek said in an email last spring. "He is going to change the way people see the visually impaired."

"Any way that God gave him to me is more than good enough. He is no less than anyone else, and I count my blessings every day that he is my son." Back in the SUV, Uek zoomed down the Dallas North Tollway, arriving at the offices of Reading and Radio Resource at exactly one o'clock.

In the studio, Zach bubbled in his chair. Oops, gotta go to the bathroom first. Then back again, headphones on, jazz-dancing in place as the show's introductory theme played.

Before long, he was practically directing the exchange, suggesting questions, taking opportunities to reiterate points he'd wanted to make earlier.

Charming. Assured. Articulate. His own person.

On a December afternoon in 2002, a baby boy is born to a young couple. Nineteen inches long, the chart says. Six pounds, 11 ounces.

His parents embrace him. His grandmother cries.

The boy looks around, sensing, exploring, discovering the world with new eyes.

AFTER CHRISTMAS SALE
Starting tomorrow 8am to noon

UP TO 70% OFF*
a luxurious selection of furs

UP TO 60% OFF*
after 12 noon
Wednesday through
Sunday, December 30

Shop

Saks Fifth Avenue

THE FUR SALON

The Dallas Morning News

508 Young St., Dallas TX 75202
USPS 147-680 Periodical postage paid at Dallas, TX 75260
Published daily by The Dallas Morning News, Inc., a subsidiary of A. H. Belo Corporation (ahbelo.com, NYSE symbol: AHC)

TODAY'S EDITION
Vol. 164,
No. 86,
6 sections

Postmaster:
Address changes to:
The Dallas Morning News
Mail Circulation Dept.,
P.O. Box 655237,
Dallas, TX 75265-5237

Missing your paper?
DMNSubscriber.com
214.745.8383 1.800.925.1500
In Dallas, Collin, Denton and Rockwall counties, we offer same-day replacement delivery within one hour if you call before 10:00 a.m. Monday through Saturday and before noon on Sunday. In all other areas and for missed deliveries reported after those times, we will credit your account.

Subscribe to the paper
DMNSubscriber.com
214.745.8383 1.800.925.1500
For next-day home delivery in metropolitan Dallas
Before noon, 7 days a week
CIRCULATION QUESTIONS?
Chip Danneker
cdanneker@dallasnews.com

Manage your account
DMNSubscriber.com Pay your bill
1.800.925.1500 Check account
Put paper on hold
Report service issues
eEdition support

Buy an ad dallasnews.com/advertising
1.877.265.3995
Classified Retail & national
214.745.8123 214.977.8000
Weddings & engagements
214.977.7855

Contact the newspaper 214.977.8222

News tips 214.977.8456
newstips@dallasnews.com

SportsDay 214.977.8444
dmnsports@dallasnews.com

Metro 214.977.8456
metro@dallasnews.com

Arts & Life 214.977.8408
artslife@dallasnews.com

Business 214.977.8429
businessnews@dallasnews.com

Editorial page 214.977.8205
editorialboard@dallasnews.com

Publisher/CEO James M. Moroney III
214.977.8866/jmoroney@dallasnews.com

Editor Bob Mong
214.977.6828/bmong@dallasnews.com

Managing Editor George Rodrigue
214.977.8341/grodrigued@dallasnews.com

Editorial Page Keven Ann Willey
214.977.8253/kwilley@dallasnews.com

Share your thoughts
asktheditor@dallasnews.com

DMN Problem Solver problemsolver@dallasnews.com
214.977.2952
or write Problem Solver, P.O. Box 655237, Dallas, Texas 75265

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS

The Dallas Morning News welcomes your comments about published information that may require correction or clarification. You can submit your comments by visiting dallasnews.com/corrections or calling 214-977-8352.

■ In Monday's SportsDay, the game the Cowboys lost when Dez Bryant's hand was ruled out of bounds on a late touchdown catch was misidentified as a loss to Washington. The Bryant play came in the final seconds of a loss to the New York Giants.

TEXAS LOTTERY

<p>Lotto Texas Saturday's numbers 21 22 29 32 46 49 Jackpot: \$16 million Number of winners: 0 Winning ticket: N/A Next drawing: Wednesday Est. jackpot: \$17 million</p>	<p>Mega Millions Friday's numbers 3 18 32 41 56 Mega Ball: 19 Jackpot: \$12 million Number of winners: 0 Winning ticket: N/A Megaplier: 3 Next drawing: Tuesday Est. jackpot: \$18 million</p>
<p>Powerball Saturday's numbers 1 18 35 39 44 Powerball: 11 Jackpot: \$40 million Number of winners: 0 Winning ticket: N/A</p>	<p>Next drawing: Wednesday Estimated jackpot: \$50 million</p>
<p>Texas Two-Step Monday 6 8 15 27 (Bonus ball: 28)</p>	<p>Pick 3 Monday afternoon 10 6 Monday night 13 4</p>
<p>Cash 5 Monday 18 31 33 34 35</p>	<p>Daily 4 Monday afternoon 5 6 5 4 Monday night 6 5 6 5</p>

For complete results, visit dallasnews.com/lottery.

*SALE ENDS DECEMBER 30, 2012. REDUCTIONS OFF REGULAR AND ORIGINAL PRICES. INTERMEDIATE MARKDOWNS MAY HAVE OCCURRED PRIOR TO THIS SALE. NO ADJUSTMENTS TO PRIOR PURCHASES. FUR ORIGIN: DENMARK. DALLAS GALLERIA, 15550 DALLAS PKWY. CALL 972.716.5346
VISIT THEFURSALON.COM, DOWNLOAD THE SAKS APP OR FIND US ON FACEBOOK, TWITTER AND SAKSPKOV.COM