

Hilltop: Holidays Edition

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December 22, 2015

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Issue Number: 8

Where's Winter?

By: Courtland Corrente

Even though some people hate it, many people are still asking “Where is the snow?!” Normally we would be experiencing cold weather and winter-like conditions by now. Instead, we have been turning down the heat in our house because the temperature has been in the 50’s and 60’s, and even approached 70 once last week. Instead of snow, we’ve been seeing rainy days which we all know do not cause delays or cancellations. So, what is actually going on here? Are we ever going to see snow this winter? The answer is yes, and here are the reasons why.

This strange weather is being caused by an irregular occurrence and a complex series of climatic changes called El Niño. This event typically occurs every 2 to 7 years, and the one we are experiencing now was identified about 6 months ago; scientists still cannot figure out exactly what caused it. There are a lot of complex weather words used in describing this, but to make it very simple: the El Niño causes heavy rain in California and pushes warm air across the northern United States which explains why we have unseasonably warm weather.

This irregular weather pattern has been around for a very long time, so it is not bad, but it isn’t exactly good either. The unusual rain and temperatures that El Niño brings is actually essential to most environments, but at the same time, El Niño can cause typhoons and droughts. So, when is winter weather going to get here? It is definitely on the way, and we should be getting our normal forecasts in the coming weeks, so don’t be too alarmed. Oh, and have those ski boots ready.



(Sebastian Hochrein 12/21/15) The high on this date in 2014 was 31, with snow from the season on the ground. Monday’s weather saw a high of 50 with no snow in sight.



New Years

By: Taylor McCloskey

New Year's Day, which is celebrated on January 1st, is the start of the year in the Gregorian calendar, named after Pope Gregory XIII. The celebrations of the New Year vary widely in different cultures. It is a popular holiday in Japan, which everyone celebrates his or her birthdays. In Scotland, New Year's is known as Hogmanay: after midnight on New Year's Eve, it is a custom to visit friends and relatives.

Many people on this holiday sleep in because they were ringing in the New Year and then spend the rest of the day attending church services, visiting friends and/or relatives, staying in and spending it with your family, or watching or playing a sport.

Having a feast of traditional New Year's food is also a widespread practice, but dishes vary in many countries or cultures. Many in this area use the opportunity to roast pork and enjoy a pork and sauerkraut meal over mashed potatoes...followed by the next day binge eating of hot dogs and kielbasa with the same sauerkraut.

Many people use New Year's Day as the first day to start a resolution. A New Year's resolution is a tradition very common in the Western Hemisphere but also found in the Eastern Hemisphere. It is to make a promise for self-improvement or something slightly nice. People make resolutions like losing weight, saving money, quitting bad or negative habits, or forgiving and forgetting. Some cities even have parades and televise them.

New Years is usually marked by fireworks when the clock strikes midnight. A lot of concerts/programs are televised on New Year's Eve through midnight on New Year's Day. Schools, post offices and government offices are closed on New Year's Day. Most, but not all businesses are also closed, in the countries where New Year's Day is a public holiday...well, all but the retail industry.

Hannah's Helpful Hints: Christmas!

By: Hannah Shaffer

The most wonderful time of the year is finally upon us: Christmas! Although it doesn't seem like it because, well, "Where is the snow?" Anyway, this season is all about giving, but you have to admit it is pretty nice to receive as well. However, sometimes you receive gifts that really make you wonder what was going through the person's head when they bought it. Believe it or not, it is possible to make the most of these less than perfect gifts. Don't allow the money they spent on it go to waste! Here are some tips on what you can do with them and how to actually pretend that you like them.

- Make trades with your siblings, or just threaten until they give you their gifts
- Go on Pinterest and check out DIY's—you can surely find something creative to make use of it.
- Feed it to the dog - less than perfect gifts make great dog toys: they deserve to be ripped up anyways.
- Smash it with a hammer to get that anger out!
- Regift! Save it for someone else, this way you save \$\$
- Try to return it so you can get \$ back
- Sell it on eBay
- Sell it to someone on the playground
- Give it to Goodwill or the Salvation Army—they are always in need of gifts of all types
- "accidentally" stain clothing
- "accidentally" shrink it in the wash

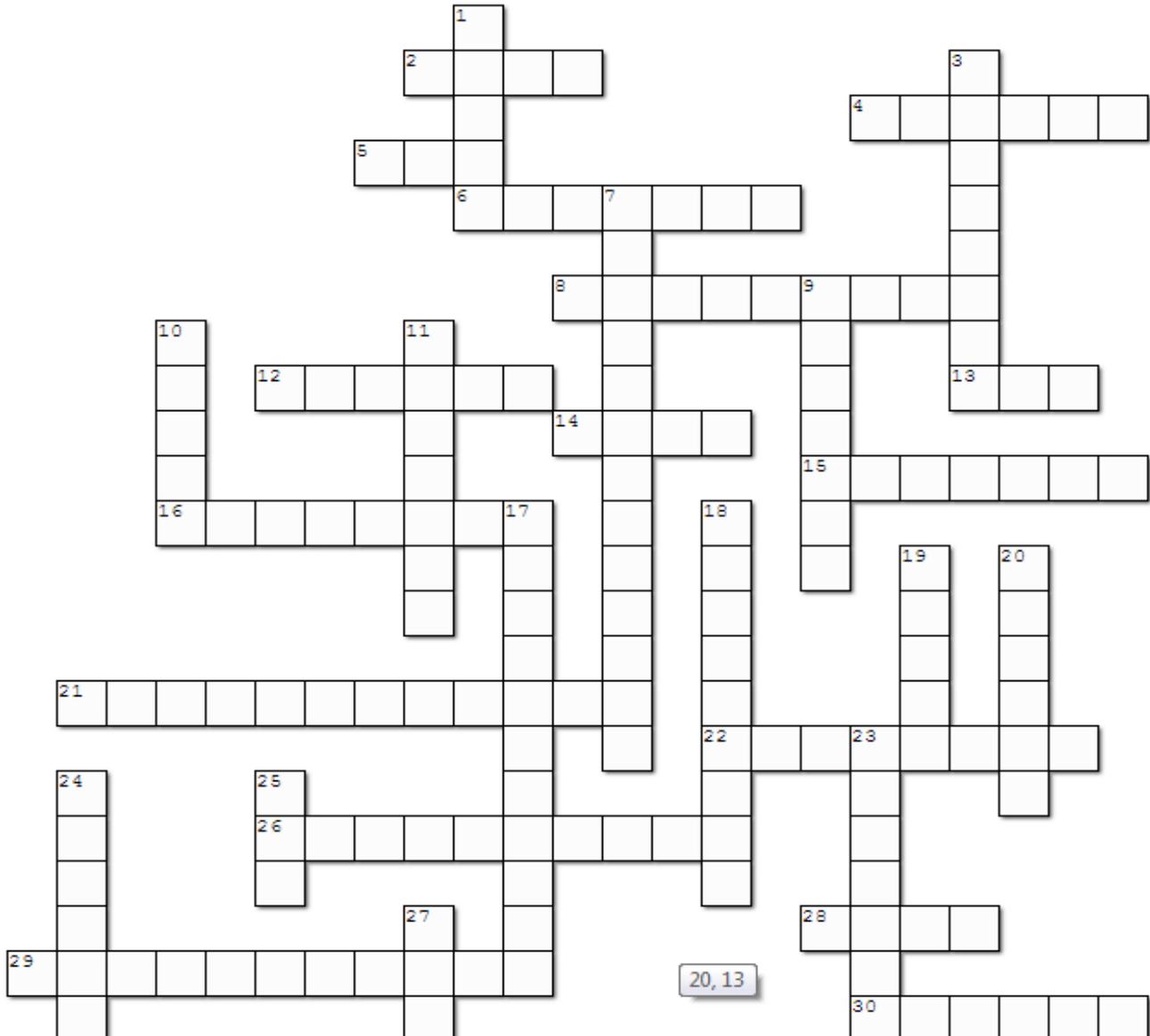
However, **ALWAYS** pretend you like your gifts just like that kid who says "It's an avocado...thanks!"

In conclusion, the holidays mean a whole lot more than just gifts! On the flip side, even though you may not like that particular gift, your family got it for you with love, and it is the thought that counts.

By: Emily Niper

Christmas

Complete the crossword below



Across

- 2. The mother of Christ
- 4. Santa's vehicle
- 5. The color of Rudolph's nose
- 6. What is Frosty?
- 8. Traditional red-and-white-strip candy
- 12. What we sing around Christmas time
- 13. The color of Santa's suit
- 14. Santa keeps a ____ showing who is good and who isn't
- 15. Used to describe children who misbehave often
- 16. What hangs from the chimney
- 21. The day before Christmas
- 22. What is left under the tree
- 26. This type of Christmas tree may be used year after year
- 28. What bad kids get in their stocking
- 29. Another name for Santa
- 30. Christmas Drink

Down

- 1. People often mail these to friends
- 3. The animals that travel with Santa
- 7. Used to make presents more festive looking
- 9. A 'Door' for Santa
- 10. Santa's Workers
- 11. A treat commonly left for Santa
- 17. '5_____'
- 18. Where Santa works
- 19. The color of Santa's beard
- 20. Things to make the Christmas tree bright
- 23. Christmas Hater
- 24. Circular tree branch
- 25. Often traditional Christmas entree
- 27. 'You smell like beef and cheese'

History of Hanukkah

By: Braedon St. Clair

The eight-day Jewish celebration known as Hanukkah or Chanukah commemorates the rededication during the second century B.C. of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. According to legend, Jews had risen up against their Greek-Syrian oppressors in the Maccabean Revolt.

Hanukkah, which means “dedication” in Hebrew, begins on the 25th of Kislev on the Hebrew calendar and usually falls in November or December. Often called the “Festival of Lights,” the holiday is celebrated with the lighting of the menorah (the gold candelabrum whose seven branches represented knowledge and creation), traditional foods, games and gifts. However, the events that inspired the Hanukkah holiday took place during a particularly rough phase of Jewish history.

Around 200 B.C., Judea—also known as the Land of Israel—came under the control of Antiochus III, the Seleucid king of Syria, who allowed the Jews who lived there to continue practicing their religion. His son, Antiochus IV Epiphanies, proved less caring. Ancient sources recount that he outlawed the Jewish religion and ordered the Jews to worship Greek gods. In 168 B.C., his soldiers descended upon Jerusalem, massacring thousands of people and desecrating the city’s holy Second Temple by erecting an altar to Zeus and sacrificing pigs within its sacred walls. The story of Hanukkah does not appear in the Torah (book of Jewish written law) because the events that inspired the holiday occurred after it was written. Interestingly enough, it is, however, mentioned in the New Testament, in which Jesus attends a “Feast of Dedication.”

When Mattathias died in 166 B.C., his son Judah, known as Judah Maccabee (“the Hammer”), took the helm; within two years the Jews had successfully driven the Syrians out of Jerusalem, relying largely on guerilla warfare tactics. Judah called on his followers to cleanse the Second Temple, rebuild its altar and light its menorah, and these were meant to be kept burning every night..



Andrew's Automotive Assessment

By: Andrew Koval



2002 Pontiac Grand Am SE

The 2002 Pontiac Grand Am SE has to be without a doubt in mind one of the worst cars Pontiac has ever made. This car comes with either a 2.2L Ecotech Inline (Engine is horizontal in engine bay) 4 Cylinder Engine that produces up to 145 horsepower; on the other hand, it also comes with a 3.4L V6 that produces 175 horsepower. Even though this car is not the most powerful car in the world, it is very fuel efficient getting 25-30 MPG (miles per gallon). Even though it is a fuel efficient car it doesn't make up for how poorly this car was made.

For example there are reports where owners of this car stated things such as “The car just shut off while I was driving...The Electric System goes bonkers...Engine blew up...Car caught on fire.” On some of the Grand Am’s, if you beat them up enough, eventually a “trac off” light will come on the car. If this happens, do not worry...it just means you’re about to pay a lot of money for a new transmission because it will literally put your car into a certain type of launch mode and slam your transmission into gear and launch you forward.

There are interior problems as well as operational. For example the heat will eventually fail or turn on by itself. The radio will turn itself on and sometimes even turn the music up without anyone touching it. Not to mention it’s a game of “Interior Warning Light Russian Roulette” whenever you turn the car on because you never know what warning light is going to come on next. I highly recommend to never buy this car unless it’s for a demolition derby. Heed my warnings and take this advice. It could possibly save your life.

Richardson's Reflections

By: Alexis Richardson

Mr. Link

Q: Tell me about your favorite comic

A: My favorite would be Blondie. I enjoy seeing Dagwood eat all of his oversize sandwiches

Q: Do you like rainy days or snowy winter days more? Why?

A: I enjoy snowy wintery days more. Everything looks so calm and serene blanketed in a heavy coat of snow

Q: What do you do in your free time?

A: I enjoy being outdoors in my free time. Whether it be gardening, hunting or cutting firewood, the fresh clean air allows me to clear my head and enjoy my surroundings

Q: What makes you laugh?

A: The quirky parts of everyday life

Q: What motivates you?

A: Students who desire to better themselves and come to the shop enthusiastic to work each and everyday

Mr. Michrina

Q: Are you old fashioned?

A: I think I am. I feel like I should've been born in the 50's

Q: What scares you the most and why?

A: Bugs. I don't like all of their legs

Q: What's your favorite play in general?

A: *Tick, Tick, Boom*. It's a small musical with a cast of four people. It's about a struggling playwright finding success

Q: How do you feel about directing a play without Mr. Fox?

A: It can be nerve wracking. But I have a great assistant director (author plug)

Q: Would you direct another play by yourself? If so, why?

A: Yes. Because I think acting does a lot for students. It helps with a lot of skills

Secret Santa

By: Elliott Vassas

Just like years past, students and staff had the chance to participate in Secret Santa. What is Secret Santa you may ask? There are a couple different definitions that you may hear, but the main purpose behind this event is to help the less fortunate families and children who would not otherwise receive gifts to have the opportunity to actually receive gifts for Christmas. Most times, sponsored families send in a wish list for their children. Normally each grade level or class gets a different family that they can buy gifts to fill the respective lists. Some may buy for a little boy that wants boots, trucks, and action figures. Others may donate items towards a girl who needs a winter coat and wants a Barbie doll. The items are later wrapped in fun wrapping paper or sometimes even put in shoe boxes with pretty bows. The most rewarding part of fundraising for Secret Santa is knowing that you have helped many families by giving them a very memorable experience on Christmas...one that they most likely wouldn't have had if not for your help. Just imagine how happy they are knowing Santa came to their house on Christmas night. Also, imagine how their faces light up when they open up the presents. This year the high school was once again successful at receiving items from donations. We want to thank everyone who participated this year!!



Lady Mustang Basketball Brief

Not Enough for North Star

By: Katie Nolan

On Wednesday night, December 16th, 2015, the Portage Lady Mustangs traveled to Boswell to take on the North Star Lady Cougars at 7:00. Going into the game the Lady Mustangs were 3-0 after defending their Art Burkett championship emphatically and then defeating Salisbury in a lopsided win. The Lady Cougars were 4-0 having already won the Forest Hills Tip-Off Tournament.

The Lady Mustangs starters for Wednesday night were juniors Abby Chobany and Lauren McCabe and seniors Katie Nolan, Kacie Baker, and Lexi Wozniak. The Lady Mustangs and the Lady Cougars fought in an intense game until the end, but because of turnovers and not capitalizing on opportunities, the Lady Mustangs still trailed the Lady Cougars the entire game. The Lady Mustangs were down 12 at the half with a score of 25-13, but they came out with a spark, closing in on the deficit. With 3:48 left in the game, the Lady Mustangs closed the gap making it a 4 point game, 34-30. Using their senior experience, however, the Lady Cougars left The Lady Mustangs short at the final buzzer, losing the game 46 -33. North Star's Courtney Schrock tallied 13 points to lead the Lady Cougars while Portage's Kacie Baker tallied 9 points to lead the Lady Mustangs. Wednesday night's game left the Lady Mustangs 3-1 and advanced the Lady Cougars to 5-0.

Rambler Rally Falls Short

4 Lady Mustangs Post Double Digit Scoring

On Friday night, December 18th 2015, the Portage Lady Mustangs hosted the Windber Lady Ramblers in what was billed as a "Green Out" at 7:00 in the Len Chappell Gymnasium. Going into the game the Lady Mustangs were 3-1, coming off a tough loss to conference front-runner North Star. Lady Ramblers were 2-3 after posting a decisive win over Ferndale. The starters for Friday night were juniors Abby Chobany and Lauren McCabe and seniors Katie Nolan, Kacie Baker, and Lexi Wozniak.

The Lady Mustangs started the game off in their favor with Lauren McCabe winning the tip. The Lady Mustangs battled with the Lady Ramblers in a close back and forth match up all night, but the Lady Mustangs were able to pull through with the win 71-65, bouncing back from the hard loss Wednesday night. Katie Nolan led the team in scoring with 20 points, while Kacie Baker also tallied 19, Lexi Wozniak had 15 and Lauren McCabe had 11. The Lady Mustangs are now 4-1 with the winter break soon to follow that will include a tournament at Ligonier after Christmas.



Sounds of the Season

By: Sumer Slebodnick and Elona Krcishta

It's the time of year when the concert band and chorus host their annual Christmas concert to help families along with the town get in the Christmas spirit. This year, the concert was held on Sunday, December 13th at 6 p.m. The brass choir played original Christmas tunes as the audience filled their seats. Once 6 p.m. hit the concert began. The bands performed a mixture of modern and traditional Christmas music this year. The junior high band, grades seven and eight, started off the show with their three songs titled The Name's Claus, ... Santa Claus arranged by Mark Williams, All Is Well arranged by Michael Brown, and Bell Carol Rock arranged by Ryan Fraley.

Next, the senior high band, grades nine through twelve, took the stage and performed their portion of the concert. Their songs were titled Kris Kringle's Jingle arranged by Jerry Williams, O' Magnum Mysterium arranged by H. Robert Reynolds, and I Saw Three Ships arranged by Larry Kerchner.

The band director, Mr. Rousell commented, "The preparation for the concert was chaotic as usual, but we made it work like always."

When asked about the transition from marching band to concert band, Mr. Rousell remarked, "The students did their part. Band concerts aren't all about my teaching; it's about the students too. I am very proud of these kids for their hard work. It was difficult to transition from marching band to concert band in such a short amount of time, but we did it, and I believe it was a great outcome overall."

After both of the bands finished with their part of the concert, the choruses took over with their part, beginning with the junior high chorus. The junior high chorus sang three songs: Hanukkah Night, Winter Dream, and Kelly Clarkson's Underneath the Tree.

Following the junior high chorus was the A 'Cappella ensemble. The A 'Cappella ensemble choir sang four traditional Christmas tunes that included O' Come All Ye Faithful, We Three Kings, Carol of the Bells, and Jolly Old St. Nicholas. During the singing of Carol of the Bells, alumni of the A 'Cappella ensemble were invited to join as has become the tradition here at Portage Area.

Finally, the senior high chorus closed the concert with their three songs: Bidi Bom, Christmas Canon, and Christmas Jazz. According to chorus director, Miss Myers, "There were no problems with the chorus part of the concert, and I was glad it all went down so easily. Even with the concert being a week early in the original scheduling, the chorus was rushed, but all ended coming out smoothly."

The scheduling was rushed this year and changed up, but that did not interfere with the chorus members. According to Miss Myers, "There were nothing but compliments about the chorus. There were compliments from parents, students, and staff members of the Portage Area School District. I was very happy with the outcome, and especially since it was so rushed this year, I'm glad that the chorus members got it together and sang so well."

The A 'Cappella ensemble members also had a separate portion of the concert in addition to singing at Rebekah Manor and Maple Winds nursing homes. They also gave a Friday night concert and sing-along held at the Chatterbox in Portage. Each performance lasted about an hour and the outcome of them all was absolutely great.

Throughout the entire program of singing, there were some individual performances by members that need recognized. Earning a solo is a tremendous accomplishment to the singers individual ability, dedication, and practice to be at their best. Respective soloists for the choruses were students Sierra Crum, Jenna Teno, Hannah Papcun, Kylie McCarty, Robert Ports, and Austin Vera.



By: Emily Niper

Origin of Christmas

Christmas Tree

Germany is credited with starting the Christmas tree tradition as we now know it in the 16th century when devout Christians brought decorated trees into their homes. Some built Christmas pyramids of wood and decorated them with evergreens and candles if wood was scarce. Just as early Christians recruited Roman pagans by associating Christmas with the Saturnalia (ancient Roman festival of Saturn), so too worshippers of the Asheira cult and its offshoots were recruited by the Church sanctioning "Christmas Trees". Pagans had long worshipped trees in the forest, or brought them into their homes and decorated them, and this observance was adopted and painted with a Christian veneer.

Mistletoe

Mistletoe is a plant that grows on willow and apple trees. The tradition of hanging it in the house goes back to the times of the ancient Druids. It is supposed to possess mystical powers which bring good luck to the household and wards off evil spirits. It was also used as a sign of love and friendship in Norse mythology, and that's where the custom of kissing under the mistletoe comes from. Norse mythology recounts how the god Balder was killed using a mistletoe arrow by his rival god Hoder while fighting for the female Nanna. Druid rituals use mistletoe to poison their human sacrificial victim. The Christian custom of "kissing under the mistletoe" is a later synthesis of the sexual license of Saturnalia with the Druidic sacrificial cult.

Christmas Present

In pre-Christian Rome, the emperors compelled their most despised citizens to bring offerings and gifts during the Saturnalia and Kalends (fixed point of the Roman month). Later, this ritual expanded to include gift-giving among the general populace. The Catholic Church gave this custom a Christian flavor by re-rooting it in the supposed gift-giving of Saint Nicholas. Gift-giving traditions around the time of the mid-winter solstice are shrouded in overlays of pagan and Christian religious practices and seasonal observations. The contemporary bank-emptying frenzy of buying, wrapping and piling things under a tree has its roots in ancient sacrifice and owes its present form to a German prince who married into the British monarchy.



Portage Palate Gossard's Grub

Toll House Chocolate Chip Pie

Crust Ingredients:

1 cup Crisco
3 cups flour
½ teaspoon of salt
½ cup of cold water
1 egg
1 tablespoon of white vinegar

Filling Ingredients:

2 eggs
½ cup flour
½ cup granulated sugar
½ cup of packed brown sugar
1 ½ stick of softened butter
1 cup of chocolate chips
1 cup of chopped walnuts

Crust Directions:

In a large bowl add the Crisco, flour, and salt
Chop the Crisco into the flour and salt until
Crisco is pea sized and then mix by hand
until it feels like wet sand
Create a well in the center of the bowl
In another bowl beat together eggs, water, and
vinegar
Add to the flour mixture and gently fold together
until it starts to form a ball
Finish ball with hand then wrap dough in wax
paper and place in fridge for 15 minutes
Roll out and place in a 9" pie pan



Filling Directions:

In a large bowl beat eggs until
foamy
Beat in flour, granulated sugar,
brown sugar, and butter
Stir in chocolate chips and nuts

Baking Directions:

Preheat oven to 325 degrees
Spoon filling into crust and
spread evenly
Bake in oven for 55-60 minutes
Cool and enjoy