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Santa Claus distributes Christmas gifts to Lakeview Head Start students at Heritage Museum recently. The gifts were purchased with money donated by museum members, Director Nancy Raney said.

Travel safely for holidays, trooper urges

By THOMAS JENKINS Staff Writer

While the holiday season is a time for friends and family across the Lone Star State, it's also a time when many Texans find themselves on the road, traveling to see loved ones. With temperatures forecasted to drop to the low 30s — possibly even colder during the evening hours — this weekend, Hester said the weather can also be a big concern for holiday-goers who find themselves on the road. "One of the biggest factors to consider is the weather," said Hester. "You can get road condition reports by calling



Hester

800-452-9292, or pay close attention to the local weather channel. We report all road closures to both. "Pay close attention to bridges and overpasses during freezing weather as well. Another thing to remember is to allow extra time for travel because the high level of traffic is going to increase how long it takes to get where you're going." Hester said planning your trip — as well as your route — ahead of time can really pay off in

See TRAVEL, Page 3A

It's Settled

Renovations to begin in February on historic hotel

By STEVE REAGAN Staff Writer

The Settles Hotel's days as a vacant, decaying hulk are just about over. That was the news given during a Friday news conference as officials announced that a \$12 million renovation of the historic building will begin in earnest around Feb. 1, 2008. Christopher Ryan, general manager of the Settles Hotel Development Co., outlined preliminary plans for refurbishment of the Big Spring landmark during the news conference, held at Howard College's Hall Center. "This is a great day in Big

"My feelings are — let me make sure I get the right word — this is the warmest, fuzziest day I've seen in many a year. ... I didn't think we'd have that feeling again, and it's here. This is very exciting news."



—Gloria McDonald, city council member

Spring," he said. "That old building is going to get a remake soon ... We know the city has been waiting a long time for us to start work and we're not going to make them wait much longer." If Ryan was excited, however, downtown revitalization advocates reacted as if Christmas had come a week early. "My feelings are — let me make sure I get the right word — this is the warmest, fuzziest day I've seen in many a year," said Gloria McDonald, city councilwoman and member of Main

Street Inc. " ... I didn't think we'd have that feeling again, and it's here. This is very exciting news." "Obviously, the feeling is indescribable," Big Spring Mayor Russ McEwen said. "We are in a position where things we hoped and prayed for are coming to a pass — and what could be better?" Ryan returned the compliments, thanking city and county officials for their help in getting the project off the ground. City and county agencies recently agreed to provide financing. See SETTLES, Page 3A



HERALD photo/Steve Reagan Christopher Ryan, general manager of Settles Hotel Development Co., talks about plans for a \$12 million renovation of the historic building during a Friday news conference at Howard College.

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FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS MERRY CHRISTMAS The Festival of Lights continues nightly from 6 to 10 p.m. at Comanche Trail Park. See Page 1C

SHOWER CLEAN SUITS TOKYO (AP) — No time to take your suit to a dry cleaner? Just turn on the shower to wash it at home. Washable suits are already available, but Japanese clothing company Konaka says its "Shower Clean" line of business suits, which can be washed in a warm shower and require no ironing, is one-of-a-kind. Konaka says the suits — made of a lightweight fabric easy to clean — will be available in February in Japan. The suits, available for both men and women, will be priced between \$260 and \$492, according to the company, which has some 320 stores nationwide.

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# Nation's neediness more apparent this holiday season

By MARTHA IRVINE

AP National Writer

CHICAGO — A Salvation Army shelter in a well-to-do Kansas county has an unprecedented waiting list that includes families who've lost their homes to foreclosure.

In Florida, a real estate agent who said she was having a tough time making it this year sought assistance from a food bank for herself and her children. And in Maryland, one agency that serves families says it's seeing more young, working, single mothers who move into shelters and ask family members to care for their kids. They just can't afford rent.

Stories like these tell of a holiday season rife with need across the country, but also what aid workers are calling a disturbing and growing need for assistance all year round.

Everywhere, people are feeling the crunch of rising gasoline and grocery prices, as well as utility bills, rent and mortgage payments. Those factors

also are cutting into people's ability to donate.

"Not only can they not give, many — for the first time — have need and are coming to us," says Melissa Temme, a spokeswoman for the Salvation Army, where stories like that of the overflow at the Johnson County Family Lodge in Kansas are becoming increasingly common.

Last year, 4.8 million Americans got holiday assistance from the Salvation Army, everything from meals and clothing to gifts. It's too early to tell if those numbers will go up this year. But while her organization generally sees a surge in giving of gifts and at kettles right before Christmas, Temme says she's sensed a general unease among staff about the level of need that's out there.

Others say the same. "This isn't a holiday shortage, per se. This is a shortage that's been building," says Ross Fraser, a spokesman for America's Second Harvest, a domestic

hunger-relief organization based in Chicago. At Thanksgiving, the organization estimates that food banks nationally were short a total of 15 million pounds of food, or roughly 11.7 million meals.

Since then, his agency has heard about recent shortages at food banks, from New York, Illinois and Tennessee to Texas and California. One food bank in Dallas reports having to spend \$100,000 a month buying food, because of declining donations of excess food from grocery stores and farmers through the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"I don't think anybody ever thought food banks would be going out and buying food," Fraser says. One food bank in Orlando, Fla., he says, told of a single mother who was forced to get food donations because her income as a real estate agent fell from \$66,000 last year to just \$18,000 this year, due to slumping housing sales.

Rebecca Wagner, executive director of

Community Ministry of Montgomery County, Md., also has seen the need for emergency aid growing among the working poor.

"Before they were cobbling together three and four jobs to make ends meet," Wagner says. "Now that utility bill is a backbreaker."

She's been encouraging donors to make pledges beyond the holiday season — for instance for utility bills and rent next year.

"Toys and bags of oranges only go so far when you can't keep your heat on," Wagner says. But, she adds, families always appreciate the help at the holidays, too.

"All of it helps," she says.

Considering that individual donors represent about three-quarters of all charitable contributions, it means the last few months of giving in a year are critical, says Albert Ruesga of The Meyer Foundation, which funds aid organizations in Washington, D.C., and beyond.

"The giving that happens around the holiday season is really the lifeblood of many organizations that serve our poorest communities," he says.

Corporate donations are also key.

Wal-Mart recently announced that it would donate 50 truckloads of food and grocery items to America's

Second Harvest, while ConAgra Foods will donate 35 truckloads and pledged to match individual donations to America's Second Harvest up to \$200,000.

Many others focus on local giving.

That includes Navistar Financial Corp., the Schaumburg, Ill.-based finance subsidiary of the International Truck and Engine Corporation.

Among other things, employees from the company give gifts each year to hundreds of students at

the Lafayette Specialty School, an school that serves toddlers all the way up to eighth-graders in Chicago's Humboldt Park neighborhood.

John Mulvaney, Navistar Financial's chief financial officer, recently played Santa Claus as he and his staff handed out the gifts to excited students who'd written "letters to Santa."

Tia Martins, a fourth-grader, was one of those. She asked for an electronic diary, "so I can write all the things that happened to me, so I would never forget them."

"It means a lot to me that people that I don't even know would go out and spend their hard-earned money on me," Tia says. "Even though I don't get a lot of gifts, I'm still happy with what I have, not what I could've had."

## SETTLES

Continued from Page 1A

cial backing for the project in the form of up to \$3 million in reimbursement funds and a 10-year abatement on property taxes.

"Without that money, this project was dead in the water," Ryan said. "We literally couldn't get this done with the city and county's financial assistance."

Ryan outlined a two-to-three-year effort that would refurbish the build-

ing into a combination of offices, hotel space and residential apartments.

Environmental abatement work has already begun at the old Greyhound station adjacent to the hotel and will continue into the main building in the coming weeks, he said.

After that, plans call to secure the building and perform "minor structural work" before construction begins around Feb. 1, Ryan said.

He envisions the basement and first two floors of the building being

refurbished to the same level as the hotel's glory days.

"I want people to walk into the lobby and it look the same as it did in 1930," Ryan said. "This used to be a happening place, and there's no reason it can't be again."

Other plans call for the tower of the building being used for a combination of hotel rooms and residential apartments, with the old bus station housing a swimming pool and/or other recreational services for hotel tenants. Ryan is hopeful renova-

tion of the Settles will trigger even more revitalization efforts in the downtown area.

"We hope this is the domino that pushes other property owners in the area to get working on their projects," he said.

Contact Staff Writer Steve Reagan at 263-7331, ext. 234 or by e-mail at reporter@bigspringherald.com.

## TRAVEL

Continued from Page 1A

the event of an emergency.

"If you're traveling to see family, be sure to tell them what your route will be," said Hester. "That makes it a lot easier when we have to go out and look for someone. Also, be sure to keep

emergency items in the vehicle, such as first-aid kits and blankets.

"No one wants to think about what can go wrong out on the road, but it's always a good idea to be

prepared."

Contact Staff Writer Thomas Jenkins at 263-7331 ext. 232 or by e-mail at citydesk@bigspringherald.com

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Steve Evrard, 36, died Sunday, Dec. 9, 2007. Memorial services will be at 2 p.m. Saturday at First Baptist Church. Burial with Military Honors will be at Trinity Memorial Park.

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