



# The Valley

Minnesota AG files lawsuit against foreclosure consultants

**BRIEFS**

**One dies after car flips on Interstate 90**

**FAIRMONT** — One person died when a car hit an ice patch on westbound Interstate 90, lost control, went into a ditch and flipped, the State Patrol said. The accident occurred Thursday at about 4:30 p.m. four miles west of Blue Earth. The State Patrol isn't releasing any victims' names pending notification of families.

**Alltel features comedian, dance show**

**MANKATO** — Two upcoming events at the Alltel Center have been announced: comedian Ron White and Michael Flatley's "Lord of the Dance" 10th anniversary tour. Tickets go on sale 10 a.m. today for the "Lord of the Dance" performance, which will be 7:30 p.m. Feb. 6. Tickets are \$38 and \$48. Flatley is an international Irish dancing star. White, famous for his stint with the "Blue Collar Comedy Tour," will be making his second stop in Mankato during his performance 8 p.m. Feb. 23. Tickets also go on sale 10 a.m. today and are \$39.75. Charge by phone at 625-7919 or visit ticketmaster.com.

**New doctorate programs at MSU**

**MANKATO** — The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools has approved two new doctoral programs at Minnesota State University. They are the doctor of nursing practice and the Ed.D in counselor education and supervision. The commission's Institutional Actions Council voted to extend degree-granting authority for the two new programs to MSU. The commission's Board of Trustees validated the actions in October. The two new programs started this fall after the 2005 Legislature gave state universities the go-ahead to confer applied doctorates. Four students are enrolled in the doctor of education program in counselor education and supervision, and five students are pursuing the doctor of nursing practice degree.

**Santa Claus coming to Hubbard House**

**MANKATO** — The R. D. Hubbard House in Mankato will host a visit from Santa Claus from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday. The event is open to the public. Adult admission is \$3 and children ages 5 to 17 is \$1. Blue Earth County Historical Society members and children younger than 5 are free. Admission fee also allows guests to tour the historic Hubbard House, 606 South Broad St. For more information, call 345-5566 or 387-1008.

**Alltel to match Salvation Army aid**

**MANKATO** — Alltel Wireless will match Mankato residents' donations to The Salvation Army's red kettles that are now in Alltel's two Mankato retail stores. The Red Kettle Campaign ends Dec. 24 and all of the proceeds will stay in Mankato. Alltel's Mankato stores are at 1870 Madison Ave. and 1850 Adams St.

## Patrols to be enhanced

### Blue Earth County one of deadliest in state

By Amanda Dyslin  
Free Press Staff Writer

**MANKATO** — Blue Earth County, together with 14 other counties in Minnesota, accounted for half of the impaired-driving related deaths in the state from 2004-2006. Because of this, enhanced patrol by law enforcement will take place the rest of the

month in Blue Earth County and the other "deadliest impaired-driving counties," according to the Minnesota Department of Public Safety. As part of the Safe and Sober program, the rest of the 87 counties in the state also will have stepped-up enforcement by more than 400 law enforcement agencies. But the 15 deadliest will receive the most focus with

Operation NightCAP, nighttime concentrated alcohol patrols. "We're fishing where the fish are," said Dennis Smith, information officer with the state Department of Public Safety. "We know that's where the biggest problem is." Blue Earth County, the only county in the region on the top 15 list, had eight alcohol-related traffic deaths from

**Alcohol-related traffic deaths, crashes and arrests 2004-2006**



County	Deaths	Severe injuries
Blue Earth	8	25
Brown	3	9
Faribault	3	6
Le Sueur	3	27
Martin	5	4
Nicollet	1	6
Sibley	1	10
Waseca	2	7
Watonwan	1	3

Source: Minnesota Department of Public Safety

J. Malmanger

2004-2006, which ties with Beltrami and Rice counties for the lowest number of deaths on the top 15 list. Hennepin County had the highest number at 48, which is typical because of its large population, Smith said.

Please see DEATHS, Page B3

## Mankato Regional Airport runway expansion dedicated



A U.S. Air Force C-130 transport plane lands Thursday during the dedication of the new, longer runway at the Mankato Regional Airport. The C-130 could have landed on the old runway, but it used to need a waiver because of its weight, airport manager Kevin Baker said.

Pat Christman

## Plane facts

### Mesaba eyes MSU aviation grads for pilots

By Dan Linehan  
Free Press Staff Writer

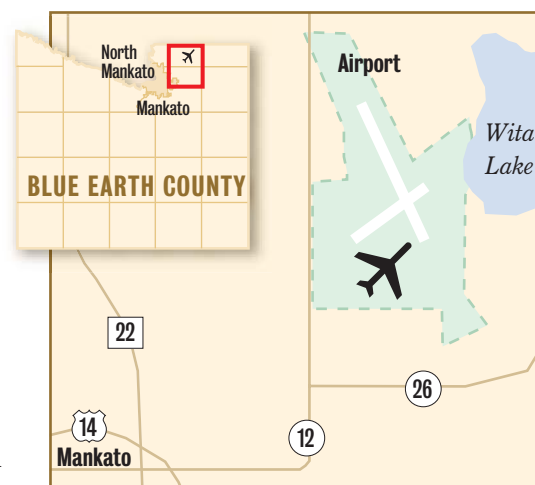
**MANKATO** — When Craig Ruedy graduated from Minnesota State University's aviation program in 1988, he had between 1,000 and 1,500 hours of flight time coming before he could land a commercial pilot's wings. That meant long hours on aerial oil pipeline patrol, or maybe taking photos from the air and selling

them. But future graduates might not have to look forward to that sort of drudgery, thanks to a new partnership announced Thursday between MSU and Mesaba Airlines during the dedication of a runway expansion at the Mankato Regional Airport. It guarantees students who complete 10 specified courses an interview — but not necessarily a job — with Mesaba. All they need is 250

hours in the air. Ruedy, chair of the aviation department, said students can reasonably amass 250 hours while still in school. "To have an interview at 250 hours is a big deal," said Mikhail Wojcik, a senior aviation student who joked that he recently "put some skid marks" on the revamped runway. Aviation students already do all of

their flight training at the Mankato airport. Mesaba, a regional carrier owned by Northwest Airlines, has nearly

Please see AIRPORT, Page B3



J. Malmanger

## Loyola Parade event to prepare for NYC trip

By Tanner Kent  
Free Press Staff Writer

**MANKATO** — More than 40 million out-of-towners visit New York City every year. Mankato Loyola seniors Anné Marzinske, Rebecca Hovland and Rachel Hovland have never been among them. Some of America's most notable tourist destinations are in New York City: the Statue of Liberty, Times Square, the Empire State building. And that's before the dozens of museums, department stores, glitzy fashion depots and, of course, subway terminals. But Marzinske and the Hovland sisters will enjoy those sites only briefly when they visit New York for the first time in March. And that's because the seniors are not going to New York as tourists, but as humanitarians.

"We'll do a little bit of the tourism thing," Rebecca

**If You Go**

**What** Loyola's Parade of Homes fundraiser

**When** 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday

**Where** The Butler House and four other Mankato homes

**Admission** Tickets are \$10. On sale at Loyola today and at the Butler House through the weekend.

Hovland said. "But we're going to do a lot of service stuff. That's the fun part — serving other people." The three girls are among almost 90 Loyola students and teachers who are going on the school's annual band and choir trip in the spring. Every two years, the school holds fundraisers and sponsors a trip. And while this year's itin-

Please see PARADE, Page B3

## Holding steady



Pat Christman

Gustavus Adolphus College sophomore Katelyn Johnson has candles in a crown lit by her attendants while serving as St. Lucia during the school's Chapel service Thursday. The Festival of St. Lucia commemorates the courage shown by St. Lucia, who was put to death for being Christian and helping the poor.

## Walz hails House energy bill

By Mark Fischenich  
Free Press Staff Writer

Congressman Tim Walz called an energy bill passed by the House Thursday "historic" and "ground breaking," and Sen. Norm Coleman called it a deal breaker that wouldn't pass the Senate. The energy bill, which would raise vehicle fuel efficiency standards by 40 percent and force electric utilities to generate 15 percent of their power with renewable energy, appears destined to be the latest House-passed bill that will stall in the Senate or face a presidential veto. Both Walz, a Mankato Democrat, and the Republican Coleman praised key components of the bill, particularly the renewable energy provisions that will be good for the Midwestern ethanol industry.

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# PARADE: Sharing music

Continued from Page B1

erary does feature stops at the Metropolitan Opera and Ground Zero, the rest of the trip includes singing at a hospital and performing at a homeless shelter.

"We want this to be kind of an outreach to people who don't get to hear live music," said Bridget Hermer, Loyola's choir director. "Music uplifts people and we want to give that gift."

To help get students and staff 1,200 miles across the country, Loyola is sponsoring a Parade of Homes on Sunday. The theme, Hermer said, is welcoming the Christ child, and homes have been decorated to reflect a welcoming of the holiday spirit.

The centerpiece of the five-home tour is Mankato's historic Butler House. Now a bed-and-breakfast owned for

13 years by Ron and Sharry Tschida, the four-level English-style mansion has been lavishly decorated in an Old World holiday motif.

"We love having the Butler House in the Parade," Hermer said. "It is just awesome."

The school has done several other fundraising activities for the trip, including a number of online sales.

But the Parade of Homes fundraiser, Hermer said, is particularly meaningful because it reflects the reason for going to New York in the first place. Just as the Butler House and four Loyola families have offered to share their homes, so Loyola's band and choir have offered to share their music.

"It's a great opportunity to be able to play and perform in New York," Rachel Hovland said.



Tanner Kent

Mankato's historic Butler House is the centerpiece of Mankato Loyola's Parade of Homes fundraiser this Sunday. Four Loyola families are also on the tour, which benefits the high school choir and band trip to New York City.

# AIRPORT: Return of charter service desired

Continued from Page B1

doubled its fleet, operations director Joseph Restifo said, and is looking to hire more pilots.

He said he's not concerned that hiring less experienced pilots will be a safety issue because the training requirements are still set by the Federal Aviation Administration.

The airline was hoping to show off one of its new CRJ-900 jets, which seats 90 or so, but concerns about ice kept it from making an appearance.

While the announcement pleased college and company officials, the dedication was all about what the \$12 million, 1,200-foot extension — to 6,600 feet — will do for existing customers and the possibility of charter service.

Restifo said Mesaba wasn't there to discuss scheduled passenger, also known as "charter," service. But airport managers are hoping that the expansion will lure charter service back to Mankato.

Wayne Anderson, who

## Increased Accessibility



Pat Christman

A city poster advertising the airport upgrades shows the type of planes that can now land here. They include the 757 and any passenger airplane with a single aisle.

helps manage the airport for North Star Aviation, flies corporate jets and said the extra 1,200 feet allows pilots to take off with more fuel. It also gives them more leeway, especially on winter days like Mankato has been seeing

recently. Just about any passenger plane with a single aisle — as large as the 243-passenger Boeing 757 — can now land here. The two-aisle "wide-body" jets can't, though.

Fred Lutz, a member of the

airport commission and long-time booster, said the airport lost charter service shortly after 9/11 but is confident that it will return.

"We don't understand how valuable this piece of real estate is going to be."

# DEATHS: Holiday weekends dangerous

Continued from Page B1

The list is not weighted, Smith said. Population is not factored in when determining the "deadliest counties." The department just takes into account the basic numbers.

"Historically, the top two or three counties (on the list) are the heaviest populated," he said.

Other counties have tended to have college communities, or with counties such as Crow Wing, it's an area where more travelers and tourists come through seasonally to visit the lake country, he said.

Holiday season weekends are among the busiest DWI nights of the year, according to the state. A similar DWI enforcement period in 2006 resulted in 3,361 DWI arrests in the state.

Last December, 18 motorists died in alcohol-related crashes.

More than 500,000 Minnesotans have a DWI on their driving records.

# ENERGY: President Bush threatening a veto

Continued from Page B1

But Coleman said the requirements on power companies and the elimination of \$13.5 billion in tax breaks for oil companies, which House Democrats are using to finance renewable fuel incentives, would prevent the bill from passing the Senate.

"They're simply non-starters for 40-plus senators on our side of the aisle," Coleman said of his fellow Republicans.

In the Senate, 41 senators can block legislation because it takes 60 supporters to overcome procedural roadblocks that opponents can use to bottle up a bill.

"You've got to get to 60," Coleman said. "If you can't get to 60, you've got nothing."

Coleman said he supports the 15 percent renewable energy standard for utilities, something Minnesota already is requiring of its power companies, and doesn't object to the elimination of some of the tax breaks for

"The bill is critically important to Minnesota's agricultural producers and to our economy."

REP. TIM WALZ, 1st District Democrat

oil companies.

He said, however, the lead Republican in the Senate on energy issues, Sen. Pete Domenici of New Mexico, had been assured by a Democratic colleague that the oil company tax breaks would be preserved and the utility mandates wouldn't be part of a bill. Opponents of the House bill say the tax breaks are necessary to promote oil exploration and the renewable energy mandates would drive up electric bills for consumers.

"(House Speaker) Nancy Pelosi would not live up to the commitment that was made," Coleman said.

Walz noted the bill, which passed the House on a 235-

"You've got to get 60. If you can't get to 60, you've got nothing."

SEN. NORM COLEMAN, Minnesota Republican, counting votes in the Senate

181 vote, has support from a broad variety of organizations.

The new fuel economy standards for cars, which are increased for the first time in more than three decades, managed to satisfy a pair of interests that are typically at odds on the issue — environmental groups and the auto industry, including the labor unions employed by the industry.

The industry average for automobiles would rise to 35 miles per gallon by 2020 under the House bill, which would save an estimated 1.1 million gallons of oil consumption — the equivalent of half of what is imported from the Persian Gulf, Walz said.

The bill also has new incentives for the development and production of ethanol and

biodiesel, tax credits for the purchase of plug-in hybrid/electric vehicles and mandates for more energy-efficient appliances ranging from dishwashers to washing machines.

"The bill is critically important to Minnesota's agricultural producers and to our economy," Walz said in a written statement.

In addition to opposition by Senate Republicans, the bill also faces a veto threat from the Bush administration.

"The bill raises taxes in a way that will increase energy costs facing consumers," the White House said in a statement.

Along with opposing the elimination of the tax incentives for oil companies, the White House statement objected to the provision requiring electric utilities to use more renewable energy such as wind and solar power.

The Senate is expected to take up the bill next week before Congress adjourns for its holiday recess.

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# State AG files suits against foreclosure consultants

The Associated Press

**ST. PAUL** — Minnesota Attorney General Lori Swanson on Thursday filed two lawsuits against consulting companies that she says took advantage of homeowners facing foreclosure.

The companies — Foreclosure Assistance Solutions of Florida and two related companies based in Nevada called American Housing Authority Inc. and American Housing Financial Inc. — charged people between \$1,200 and \$1,400 to save their homes but failed to provide the assistance they had promised, the lawsuits claim.

"These companies exploited struggling homeowners who were facing a very daunting and emotional experience," Swanson said at a news conference.

A state law passed in 2004 prohibits mortgage foreclosure consultants from charging a fee until after they perform services, which could include stopping or postponing foreclosure.

Homeowners who sought help from the companies say they paid a fee up front, but then the companies wouldn't return their phone calls.

Thursday's lawsuits, which Swanson said likely won't be the last filed against foreclosure consultants in Minnesota, came the same day the Mortgage Bankers Association said home foreclosures shot up to an all-time high in the third quarter.

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