

Retail sales show rebound in economy

AUSTIN (AP) — Final figures from Christmas 1987 showed strong retail sales, a good sign that the Texas economy is rebounding, the state comptroller reported Tuesday. "When things are looking better, people splurge at Christmastime because they expect to be able to pay their bills the next year," said Tony Proffitt, director of tax information for Comptroller Bob Bullock. "It's psychological as much as anything, but it does turn into cold cash."

Bullock reported that tax collections during December showed a 56 percent jump over December 1986 collections.

"A surge in consumer spending in December brought in more than \$619 million in state sales taxes," Bullock said. During December, the 1987 Legislature's latest sales tax increase — to a 6 percent rate — was in effect. But Bullock said the increased tax collections were greater than any factor that could be attributed to the higher sales tax rate.

Bullock also said a survey of major retailers showed Christmas season sales up an average of 5.5 percent in 1987 compared with 1986.

"That's a healthy gain that will translate into a better financial position for Texas merchants and an overall improvement in the economy for all Texans," he said.

According to Proffitt, Christmas season sales are a good economic indicator for two reasons.

"Number 1, they represent from 15 percent to 20 percent of a merchant's yearly business," Proffitt said. "Number 2, when people do not have confidence that the economy is going to get better they hold back on purchases at Christmas."

Bullock said the stronger retail sales offer another indication that Texas is rebounding from the doldrums which began two years ago as the price of oil fell from near \$30 per barrel to less than \$10, sparking a downturn in many segments of the state's economy, particularly energy and real estate.



Up in the air

Randy Hughes works Tuesday to resurface the bricks on the old chemistry building. The work is part of the ongoing renovation program on the A&M campus.

Photo by David Eller

Parking

(Continued from page 1)

Wellborn Road to Texas Avenue widened to handle six lanes of through traffic. The widening means all of the parking spaces on the A&M side of University Drive from Wellborn Road to Bizzell Street will be lost. According to the highway department's plans, that strip of land will be used to provide another lane for traffic.

Robert R. Odstrcil, supervising planning engineer for the Texas Department of Highways, said the widening was necessary to handle the traffic flow on University Drive and for safety reasons. The highway department would have widened University Drive even if A&M was not building a parking garage, Odstrcil said.

Most of the construction work

should take place in the summer when there will be fewer students on campus and less traffic on University Drive, he said. Construction on University Drive should be complete by the scheduled opening of the garage in October, Odstrcil said.

Waitt said, the garage also will mean the following changes in traffic flow on campus:

- Asbury Street will remain a one-way street, but the direction of traffic flow will change from southbound to northbound.

- Traffic on Ireland Street from University Drive to the south entrance of the parking garage will be southbound only. That is a reverse of the current direction.

- From the south entrance of the garage to Ross Street, two-way traffic will be allowed. This will enable Ross Street traffic to use Ireland Street to enter the garage without circling around to University Drive.

Traffic will be able to enter the garage from either Ireland Street or University Drive, and traffic will exit the garage onto Asbury and University Drive.

- A&M also will close the Ireland Street entrance to Parking Annex 5, which is the lot between Blocker Building and University Drive. The entrance to PA 5 on Spence Street will remain open and a new entrance will be created to allow direct access to the parking lot from University Drive.

Students, teachers mourn death of teacher; suspect remains jailed

HOUSTON (AP) — Teachers and students of a local middle school mourned the brutal death of a Spanish teacher, the second such killing in the district in two weeks, while the teacher's alleged murderer remained jailed Tuesday.

"Nobody will be able to replace him," Sandra Gutierrez, a 12-year-old seventh-grader at Galena Park Middle School, said of Benjamin Jesse Todd. "He was one of my favorite teachers, and I'll really miss him a lot."

Several teachers took the news of

Todd's death hard, school counselor Gregg Hay said. Todd had taught at the school for 22 years.

"Some students are upset and the counselors are working with them, but we sent five teachers home," principal John Manison said Monday.

Manison said that although Todd was a veteran teacher, he only had 55 students because he was recovering from a stroke that he suffered last August and had just returned to school Jan. 20.

Assistant Principal Ed Rigsby, in a

loud-speaker address at the start of classes Monday, told the school's 875 sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders that Todd would want them to remain strong.

A moment of silence was observed and the school's U.S. flag was lowered to half staff.

Meanwhile, Kevin Wayne Ware, 21, remained in the Harris County Jail in lieu of \$10,000 after being arrested and charged Monday with Todd's murder.

Todd's sister found his nude, bloodied body at his Harris County

home Sunday evening, sheriff's Lt. Juan Jorge said.

Todd, 45, died from multiple stab wounds to the chest and neck, an official with the Harris County medical examiner's office said. A knife thought to have been used in the slaying was found at the scene, investigators said.

On Jan. 18, Wilbert Lavoid Perry Jr., 36, assistant principal at Cunningham Middle School, was found strangled at his home.

Police say there is no evidence that the two deaths related.

Police arrest nine in raids for gambling

AMARILLO (AP) — Police arrested nine people in two raids on alleged gambling operations, seizing \$10,000 in cash and equipment allegedly used in gambling, authorities said.

Although it was Super Bowl Sunday, most of the alleged gambling activity was on basketball games, police said.

Agents of the Organized Crime Unit and Amarillo Police Department Special Weapons and Tactics team executed the simultaneous raids Sunday morning at Unisex Hair Design beauty shop and Tic Video, authorities said.

Six people were arrested at the beauty shop, police said, and held on felony charges of promotion of gambling and operating a gambling house.

Three men were booked into the city jail on identical charges in connection with the raid on Tic Video, according to a police department spokesman who asked that his name not be used.

Eleven men who were at the establishments at the time of the raid were issued citations for gambling, a class C misdemeanor, police said.

Both operations, which had been under surveillance for some time, were taking bets on sporting events, officers said.

Authorities seized more than \$10,000 in the raids. Also confiscated were numerous betting slips, copiers and adding machines. Also, a cash register, a safe and a poster listing point spreads on various games were confiscated during the raids on both establishments, according to police.

Undercover officers had previously placed bets at both establishments, authorities said.

Oyster's red discoloration harmless, biologist explains

GALVESTON, Texas (AP) — A pigment similar to that in carrots is causing consumers to shy away from "red" oysters, although the discoloration is harmless, an oyster biologist said Tuesday.

"Although this condition is not harmful to the oyster or to the consumer, its appeal is disconcerting," said biologist Sammy Ray of Texas A&M University.

Such red discoloration has two primary causes, he said. One is a single-celled organism related to green algae taken in through natural filtering by the oyster, and the second is a pink yeast called torula.

Researchers at the school's Galveston campus say the current outbreak is due to the one-celled dinoflagellate.

"This discoloration is something that occurs sporadically throughout the years," Ray said. "In this case, the oystermen can either put them back in the water until they purge

themselves, then reharvest, or discard them."

The abnormal color in the oysters also disappears when they are cooked, Ray explained, as the pigment is destroyed. In most cases, the oysters are sent back to the producers and discarded, he said.

The dinoflagellate produces a carotene-like pigment similar to that found in carrots. Oysters feed on the dinoflagellates, which may remain in the gut of the oyster until it is harvested.

When oysters are frozen, ice crystals are formed in the cells of the oyster meat. These crystals may rupture the cells, allowing the pigment to leach out and give a red color to the liquid when thawed.

"The shucker-packer has two ways of determining whether a lot of oysters will turn red," Ray explained. "He can take a representa-

tive sample and freeze them overnight. After the sample thaws the next day, he observes the color of the liquid."

A faster means of detection is by blending the oysters with an equal volume of denatured ethyl alcohol and allowing the mix to settle for 10 minutes.

An orange to reddish color in the upper layer indicates the presence of the pigment, and a yellow color indicates its absence.

"The question has also arisen as to the connection of this discoloration to so-called red tide," Ray said.

"Red tide is any abnormal blooming of phytoplankton or red discoloration, and this one is non-toxic, both to the oyster and to the consumer. There is no harm, only discomfort and lack of appeal."

Former jail trusty receives life for death of prison dispatcher

HUNTSVILLE (AP) — A former jail trusty convicted of capital murder in the July slaying of a sheriff's dispatcher was sentenced to life in prison Monday.

Jurors in State District Judge Erwin Ernst's court deliberated about 45 minutes before sentencing James Herbert Mann, 27. The defendant could have received the death penalty.

Mann, an eighth-grade dropout, was convicted of capital murder Friday in the shooting death of Wesley Alford, 22, a dispatcher at the

Grimes County Jail. Alford, a former military policeman and martial arts enthusiast, was killed during an escape at the jail.

Testimony during the trial showed that Mann, serving a 25-year robbery sentence in the jail, and Alford clashed often over jail discipline and policies.

The capital charge stemmed from prosecution contentions that Alford was acting in the line of duty when the shooting occurred.

But Billy Carter, Mann's court-appointed attorney, argued that the jail

was a zoo and Mann was scared that Alford and another trusty were out to get him.

Mann testified Alford threw things at him, cursed him and even sneaked into his cell on occasion.

Carter said that on the night of the shooting, Alford was harassing Mann and thus wasn't acting as a peace officer — meaning the shooting wasn't capital murder.

But prosecutor Latham Boone said Alford was doing what was necessary to keep Mann from hurting anyone or escaping.

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