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Officials: Dry Winter Expected

Some Areas Up To 20 Inches
Behind Normal In Moisture

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF
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Eighty-two percent of the Missouri River basin remains in drought, with the dry conditions expected to continue at least through March, a Nebraska climatologist said Thursday.

Brian Fuchs, with the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, offered the outlook during a national phone conference.

The region can expect a white Christmas, according to the immediate forecast.

"In the short term, we expect to see a lot more active winter pattern throughout the High Plains and Midwest that is going to bring some snowfall through the end of the year," he said.

However, the next three months don't look as if they will

bring a change to the drought cycle, he added.

"Moving forward, the season forecast doesn't show any significant precipitation above normal expected during this time," he said.

That doesn't provide a promising picture for areas of South Dakota, Nebraska and Iowa that remain 12 to 16 inches below normal precipitation for the year, he said. Some regions have even fallen 20 inches below normal.

This year contains a number of Top Ten rankings for drought in 118 years of record keeping, Fuchs said. Southeast South Dakota and northeast Nebraska have remained categorized in exceptional drought — the most severe designation — for much of the year.

"Nebraska is not only the

DROUGHT | PAGE 11A

GREAT ACOUSTICS



KELLY HERTZ/P&D

A sellout crowd packed the Dakota Theatre in downtown Yankton Thursday night for a concert by "A South Dakota Acoustic Christmas." The ensemble is making its 20th tour of the state during the holiday season, and its first in four years. Joining the group for this year's tour was recording artist Michael Johnson (left), who is shown here with fiddler Kenny Putnam in the background.

SPORTS



Area Teams Battle
Thursday • **8A**

HAPPY HOLIDAYS



Dec. 21
4 shopping
days to Christmas

* * *

AP: Mass Shootings Voted Top 2012 Story

BY DAVID CRARY
AP National Writer

NEW YORK — The horrific massacre of 26 children and staff at a Connecticut elementary school, along with other mass shootings, was the top news story of 2012, narrowly edging out the U.S. election, according to The Associated Press' annual poll of U.S. editors and news directors.

The results followed a rare decision by the AP to re-conduct the voting. The initial round of balloting had ended Dec. 13, a day before the shootings in Newtown, with the election ranked No. 1, followed by Superstorm Sandy. The original entry for mass shootings, focused on the rampage at an Aurora, Colo., movie theater, placed sixth in that voting.

In the new poll, updated to account for Newtown, the mass shootings received 68 first-place votes out of 173 ballots cast for the top 10 stories, compared to 65 first-place votes for the election — one of the closest results since the AP launched the poll in 1936. On a scale of points ranging from 10 for first place to one for 10th place, the shootings tallied 1448 points, compared to 1417 for the election. The second balloting ran Dec. 17-19.

Superstorm Sandy was third, far ahead of the next group of stories.

"After we completed our poll the news agenda was reshaped, tragically, by the Newtown shootings," said Michael Oreskes, AP's senior managing editor for U.S. news. "To chronicle that we conducted the poll again before re-

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EMILY NIEBRUGGE/P&D

Michael Haas wraps presents for Gift Givers, a student-led organization that donates food and gifts to families in need during the holiday season. Gift Givers was started in 1998 by a class at Yankton High School, and has helped families every year since then.

YHS Gift Givers Work For Holidays

BY EMILY NIEBRUGGE
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A student's idea in 1998, which led to the student run organization Gift Givers, has allowed Yankton High School students to help families in need during the holidays ever since.

In 1998, Kristi O'Connell Ekroth was a teacher at YHS and helped one of her classes begin the project. Originally, students received names from Sacred Heart Monastery to give gifts and food to families who don't receive assistance or are not helped with other organizations in Yankton.

"In my American Literature Class, we were discussing realism, and we were talking about commercials on TV where you see starving children and how that makes

us uncomfortable, so we flip the channel," Ekroth said. "We were talking about how giving is important, and one of the girls, Katrina Trimble, raised her hand and said, 'This is what my family does. We call the monastery to get a family from the sisters and buy presents for them at Christmas.'

"Another student said, 'Can we do that? Can our class do that?' And that's how it started."

Today, Gift Givers receives descriptions of families from the elementary school principals, and makes one food basket and one gift basket for each family on the list.

YHS librarian Becky Tasa has worked with Gift Givers with Ekroth since 2007, but said the group is entirely student-led.

"We don't do any external fundraising for it — everything just appears," she said. "It's very cool how that happens. Kids will

sign up to bring a toy for a 6-year-old boy, and someone else will sign up to bring the clothing. We don't expect them to bring in a \$50 gift. A shirt is perfect, but the kids always go beyond that. We get the coolest gifts and everything just works out."

Students who are involved with Gift Givers supply the toys and gifts for families on the list, and the rest of the student body supplies the food. Each home room has the option to make food baskets.

Tasa said the right amount of items always seems to come together.

"No matter the year, we always have the number of baskets we need, which is really cool," she said. "This year we're helping 12 families. We don't do any out-

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Catholic Community Gives \$20,000 To Local Organizations

BY NATHAN JOHNSON
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Those in need of some assistance will get just that this holiday season thanks to Yankton's Catholic community.

As part of the ongoing "One Heart, One Mind, One Spirit" capital campaign to raise money for the new meeting and education center at Sixth and Capitol streets, Sacred Heart and St. Benedict Catholic churches awarded eight organizations monetary gifts during a media conference Thursday morning. A total of \$20,000 was disbursed at Sacred Heart.

"We've probably given out \$127,000 over the last 2 1/2 years," Father Mark Lichter said.

"We're grateful to the people who donate that, and we want to be transparent in letting people know where the money is going."

Each year, the Catholic community donates 5 percent of the donations for the facility to service organizations in Yankton.

A committee meets to decide how to distribute the funds two or three times a year, according to Tim McCaffrey, the director of Yankton's Catholic development office.

The recipients Thursday were:

- the Sacred Heart Parish Poverty Relief Fund — \$2,500;

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NATHAN JOHNSON/P&D

Members of Yankton's Catholic community and various local service organizations gathered Thursday morning at Sacred Heart Catholic Church. Through the ongoing "One Heart, One Mind, One Spirit" capital campaign, Sacred Heart and St. Benedict Catholic churches distributed a total of \$20,000 to causes that serve those in need.

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