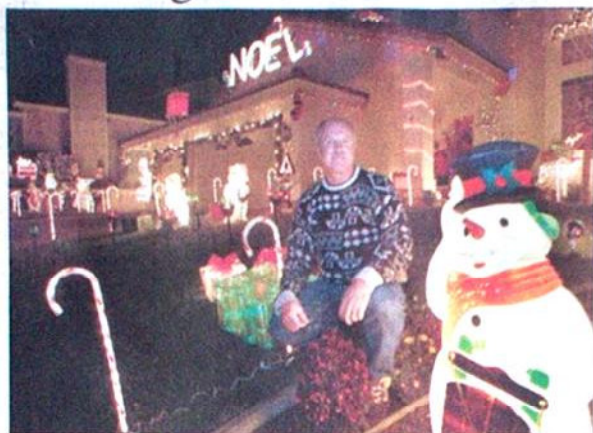




Finding Christmas Cheer



ALEX DOUVROU, creator of the Lights of the Valley Web site, stands in front of his own Christmas light display Thursday in Livermore. The Web site features photos and information about lit-up homes throughout Northern California.

Web site lists 'must-see' houses with light displays

By Jennifer Goshman

Thousands of people have found the Lights of the Valley Web site and some of the best places to look at lights in communities throughout Northern California. The man behind the Web site is Alex Douvrou. He and his family moved to Livermore in 1999. Being new to the area, they didn't know where to look for good light displays, so they checked local newspaper listings.

"Some were fantastic, but some were stinkers," Douvrou said. Douvrou decided to start a Web site. He took the list of where to find lights from the newspaper, took photos and put them online. He contacted a friend, Jim Hampton, who worked at KQED and asked him to check out the Web site. Douvrou said the radio station had said it and promoted it on the radio. The site started with about 25 houses and has more than 300 to consumers.

In the Bay Area, Stockton and Sacramento areas and as far south as Fresno, Douvrou looks at newspapers and Web sites to see where the best lights are. He has people helping in various communities to take photos of houses to put on the site. "I love it," Douvrou said. "I love the joy of getting e-mails from people telling me how much the site helps them." He wakes up at 7 a.m. each day. Please see **LIGHTS**, News 7

President urged to reassign troops

■ Military wants increase for Afghanistan as violence in Iraq abates

By Michael Abramowitz and Peter Baker

WASHINGTON — With violence on the decline in Iraq but on the upswing in Afghanistan, President Bush is facing one pressure from the U.S. military to increase a troop drawdown in Iraq and shift up to more troops in Afghanistan, according to senior U.S. officials.

American army officials said the White House could start to debate the future of the American military mission in both Iraq and Afghanistan as early as next month. Senior Pentagon officials want a secret drawdown of troops in Iraq that is reflected by the White House, which plans to reduce the number of combat brigades from 20 to 13 by the end of next summer. And commanders in Afghanistan are looking for more battalions, helicopters and other resources to conduct a resurgent Taliban.

The president's decision on Iraq and Afghanistan could determine whether he can pass on to his successor stable situations in both countries. His advisers describe that as one of Bush's paramount goals for his final year in office. They say that will hinge closely to his military. Please see **TROOPS**, News 7

Inside:

Britain returns control of Basra province to Iraqis. News 6
U.S. general says Iraq violence lowest since 2003. News 6



BAGS OF FOOD from Second Harvest Food Bank on Friday are lined up for donation at a senior center in Central Park in San Mateo. While food banks around the Bay Area continue to provide donations, directors of the charities worry that the sharp drop in donations will lead to shortages.

Shelves becoming bare, Bay Area charities report

■ Food, toy donations drop sharply from last year

By Suzanne Bohan

With the high price of gas, adjustable mortgage rates climbing, rising health care and soaring heating bills, many Bay Area families' checkbooks are too depleted at month's end to buy groceries — even those with full-time jobs.

"These are the working poor of so many," said Clay Huggins, chief executive officer of the Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San

Mateo counties, which provides free food to more than 400 households, which he says, translates it to those with severely worked paychecks. "Sixty to 70 percent of the people we provide food for have jobs," he added. "But they are on the edge" and the first thing they cut is food. They don't know where to turn except the food banks.

"This holiday season, food and toy drives are pulling in far less than last year, while demand for the goods is up, directors of these initiatives around the Bay Area reported Friday. Please see **DONATIONS**, News 7

INSIDE



GEORGE W. BUSH — Associated Press

Spending bill skirts Bush's cuts

In a \$500 billion-plus spending bill introduced by Washington lawmakers, Democrats reluctantly skirted within President Bush's budget while still protecting politically sensitive domestic programs from White House cuts.

News 4

School gardens help kids connect with food sources

By Jenny Chu

OAKLAND — As soon as Christina Chertoff appeared at the door of Mr. Pender's fifth-grade class, the cry went up: "Yeah, the garden lady!"

Her arms stacked with goodies to show the excited youngsters, Chertoff came ready to conduct a weekly gardening lesson at Lafayette Elementary School.

She dropped various seeds into water-filled cups. The children's eyes widened as their fingers examined the morsels. One student grimaced when cocorona were passed around, mistaking that they smelled "stinky."

"When you planted your seeds, what were the things that your seeds needed to start growing?"



NINTH-GRADERS at Unity High School in East Oakland plant seeds as a part of an after-school garden and nutrition program run by Jason Harvey of the Oakland Food Project.

asked Chertoff of the Oakland-based Urban Gardens, a nonprofit that provides garden-based education programs at five Oakland schools.

"Raisins and wheat" answered Emma Price, 6, "Water" someone else cried.

The young horticulturalists filed out to the school garden, to go off tending the natural world. Twenty-two raised beds laid out on a triangular plot constituted an assortment of food-bearing plants. Including tomatos, kale, Swiss chard, onions, squash, beans and strawberries. An array of bright red, yellow, pink and purple dotted the blanket of green.

This lot divvies Oakland classrooms. Please see **GARDENS**, News 7



LAFAYETTE ELEMENTARY first graders Laura Manzanarez and Jamarri Sparks, both 7, inspect seeds in flower beds with a volunteer from ODLGAS, a nonprofit that provides garden-based instruction to several Oakland schools.

INSIDE

Feds wage new crackdown on Web child porn. News 4

Classified: Insect
Lapses: Class 3
Obscure: Valley 2
Opinion: Valley 4
Local: Sports 6
Heraldwood: Valley 7
Business: Inside The Valley

Forecast

Shower
High: upper 50s
Low: lower 40s
Details on Sports 10

