



SATURDAY: Cloudy and milder, spotty showers. Low 47, high 62.



SUNDAY: Breezy and cooler. Low 30, high 54.



MONDAY: Abundant sunshine. Low 29, high 54.



UNT has shot to rebound quickly vs. Middle Tennessee Sports, 13A



IN TODAY'S E-EDITION
A rundown of eye care basics and new trends

Denton Record-Chronicle

Saturday-Sunday, January 8-9, 2022 || Denton, Texas || Vol. 118, No. 159 || DentonRC.com

27 pages, 2 sections || \$2.50

'We do life together'

PURPOSE program helps support adults with special needs

By Allison Howard

For the Denton Record-Chronicle

KRUGERVILLE — Amy Gayhart taps the jar of pickles Ryan carefully holds with both hands. The 19-year-old shuffles his feet as she gives him a sunny smile of encouragement. It's one that seems to be her default expression, especially when she enters teaching mode. But for all her cheerfulness,

Transformers DENTON'S AGENTS OF CHANGE

there is determination in the set of her shoulders.

Her current goal?

Getting Ryan to explain with as little assistance as possible the production of the pickles sold at PURPOSE Mercantile, a shop on the grounds of Blue Sky Therapeutic Riding & Respite. They stand in the center of the spherical store, which was a functioning grain silo before its transformation. Now its walls are lined with numerous special-

ty items, from bars of soap to greeting cards. Behind them hangs a black chalkboard, which borrows from Dolly Parton's wisdom, saying "Find Out Who You Are and Do It on Purpose." The PURPOSE Mercantile, which is stocked and staffed by adults with special needs, has many things to offer — including pickles.

Amy starts things off with a prompt.

"What do we grow in the garden to make these? What vegetable do we use?" She hesitates. "Cu—"

That's all Ryan needs.

See PURPOSE on 10A



Courtesy photo/Kim Groff

Ryan, 19, who participates in the PURPOSE (Providing Unique and Realistic Possibilities and Opportunities for Our Special needs Equestrians) program for adults with special needs, holds a jar of pickles in the PURPOSE Mercantile.

Improvements happening at Denton roads where deadly crashes happened



Jeff Woo/DRC

Motorists drive Thursday on U.S. Highway 380 near Rockhill Road, the site of a crash that killed three people in two vehicles last year. Seventeen fatal crashes happened in Denton in 2021, some of them on the city's most traveled roads, including U.S. 380.

Traffic deaths up in 2021

By Zaira Perez

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Improvements are underway on two major roadways where the number of cars on the road — and fatalities — are higher.

Last year, 20 people died in fatal

Essay: Denton's record 20 traffic deaths were preventable / **Opinion, 8A**

crashes in Denton. That's the highest number in the past 10 years, according to the Texas Department of Transportation. In 2020, 14 people

were killed in crashes in Denton; in 2019, 16 people died.

Fatal crashes happened in different parts of Denton in 2021, and a few happened on some of the most traveled roads. While road composition is one factor in a crash, conditions of the road also can play a role

in crashes. Some roads in Denton are getting improvements to address safety concerns.

"There's no distinct trends in the causal factors across the crashes," Sgt. Bryan Cose of the Denton

See ROADS on 11A

Hospitals face labor market strain

By John Tozzi
Bloomberg

U.S. hospitals are struggling to get the workers they need to treat patients through the winter's COVID-19 surge as the virus collides with a historically tight labor market.

High demand for labor throughout the economy is making it harder to find replacements for doctors, nurses and support staff who have been sidelined by the omicron variant. It's especially tough in small towns and rural areas with aging populations and fewer people entering the workforce.

Finding sufficient staff is a daily challenge that industry veterans say is harder than any time they can remember. Job openings in health care and social assistance are more than double their pandemic lows, and a record number of people are quitting.

"This is the most significant labor shortage that we have ever seen," said Sally Zuel, vice president of human resources at Union Health in Terre Haute, Indiana.

As a result, wages are climbing skyward: In November, hospitals' labor expense per patient was 26% above the pre-COVID-19 level two years earlier, according to data from consulting firm Kaufman Hall.

The workforce squeeze is upending every aspect of care. A Fort Lauderdale, Florida, hospital temporarily closed its labor and delivery unit due to staff shortages. The chief executive of a 25-bed facility in rural Nebraska

See NURSES on 10A

Sorry, not sorry: Local poet pens unapologetic book on disability

By Lucinda Breeding-Gonzales
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Denton resident and writer Val Vera isn't here to be anyone's inspiration.

Born with muscular dystrophy, a group of diseases that cause progressive muscle loss and physical weakness, Vera has made a life that is both unremarkable but defiant. He's a father, a boyfriend and an everyman. But it is those very things that make his life remarkable, too, he says. Because a lot of people think that kind of life eludes a man who uses a wheelchair.

He knows some people expect him to be a one-dimensional avatar of overcoming and triumph.

"No thanks," Vera said.

Vera recently published his first book through POOR Press. *Crip Lyrics: The Unapologetic Poetry of Disability* collects Vera's poetry, coupled with illustrations by Melissa Marie Eckardt, who also has a disability. The poems reflect on Vera's life and experiences, and they plumb the depths of his difference. By the end, though, the work synthesizes the uncommon experiences Vera has had as a "crip," and the universal experiences of craving acceptance and love — though from where Vera sits, the costs are bigger.

The book is confrontational, a choice that starts with the title.

"A lot of people in the disability community don't like the word and won't use it," Vera said of the word "crip," a

shortened version of the word "cripple." Vera said a lot of people with disabilities consider the word a slur, a label that shrinks a person with a disability down to what they lack.

"I've reclaimed the word," Vera said.

Vera was born and raised in California to Puerto Rican parents. The family discovered his muscular dystrophy just before he turned a year old. His late sister also had muscular dystrophy. His was a religious household. His father died from cancer when Vera was a teenager, and Vera enrolled in college and studied radio, television and film. An aspiring filmmaker, Vera said he wanted to learn how to write and shoot film.

See VERA on 11A



Denton resident Val Vera, who is a disability advocate, has a book of illustrations and poetry coming out titled "Crip Lyrics."

Jeff Woo/DRC



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