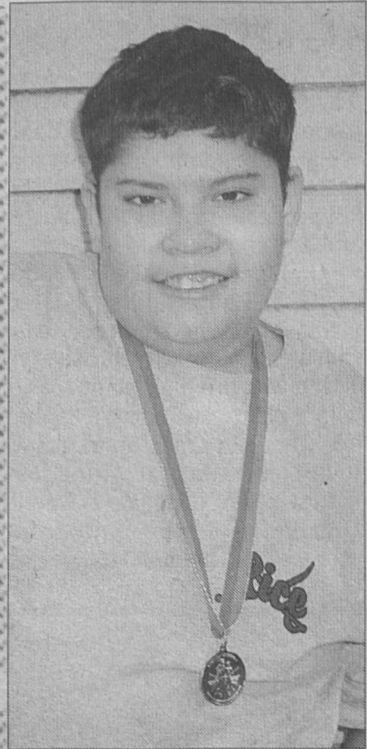




Special Olympic bowling team member Roman Herek shows off the medal he won at the Special Olympics event held in Austin in the Area 13 competition.



"City sidewalks, busy sidewalks dressed in holiday style, in the air there's a feeling of Christmas..." from the song "Silver Bells"

I was now one of them. I had read about them, had always strongly considered the challenge of joining them, but had never ventured out into the dark, cool early morning air to actually unite with them in this seasonal endeavor.

I know we're in the sporting town of Eagle Lake, but I'm not talking goose or deer hunting here.

Yet I'm wondering now if it may take a bit more determination or mindful endurance to enter into this particular activity than it would to participate in any hunting trip.

Sorry, hunters, but ladies will understand: I'm talking here about "Black Friday" shopping - the celebrated Friday after Thanksgiving that is known as the

official beginning of the holiday shopping season and that offers widely-advertised discounts, sales and bargains for those shoppers savvy enough, or crazy enough, to take advantage of what the stores so hopefully offer.

I was spending the night of Thanksgiving in Houston anyway, having just celebrated and eaten my way through the annual autumnal holiday with family at my daughter's house.

So, I wisely, financially figured, why not just stay in Houston and get up early to catch some bargains?

I had heard that Katy Mills would be opening at midnight Thanksgiving night, but after the turkey, dressing, pie and wine, I safely figured THAT wasn't going to happen for me.

I had also heard of the few hundred people who began camping out in front of stores on Thanksgiving Day and into the night, to be the lucky first few at the sliding

doors when businesses opened early the following Friday.

Not adventuresome enough for that group either, I did decide to be at one of my favorite bookstores at 7 a.m. Friday morning to grab some offered sales, plus a free tote bag, book, calendar and store coupon.

Of the first 100 people in line, one lucky customer would have a \$100 gift certificate in the tote bag. Driving up at 6:45 a.m., I was about the 40th person in line.

I shopped a little there, discovered nothing with an equivalence of \$100 in my bag, and left before the actual 100th shopper even arrived.

I was glad to hit my next store by 7:30 a.m. By that time, the streets and parking lots were already looking pretty congested.

By that hour, some of those Katy Mills shoppers had already been consumer-happy for 7 hours now.

The thought tired me out enough to grab an extra cup of

strong coffee before considering my next commercial challenge.

Most of my pocketbook damage was accomplished at the third store around 8:30 a.m.

Four stores and some dollars and credit card use later, it was already close to Noon.

My car trunk was full, my legs were tired and my caffeine consumption had placed me in overdrive.

I went back to my daughter's house to rest. (By that point, even babysitting two granddaughters was a respite in comparison to my early morning activities.)

I later learned that one of my nieces was even more into the early holiday madness.

She was in the Hill Country at deer camp with her husband and friends. She and a girlfriend left camp before the hunters awoke to take the stands.

They drove to the nearest city and my niece was dropped off in front of the opening electronics store while her friend scoured the parking lot for an open space.

They probably returned to camp with better stories than the hunters.

I have two pieces of very good news to share after my Christmas caper:

1. The recession can't be THAT bad if all those people were ready to spend some money for early Christmas shopping.

2. It can be fun and you do find some bargains, but don't forget the benefit of hometown shopping whenever possible.

The next Monday I drove through downtown Eagle Lake to make some local purchases. There was no maddening, pushy crowd. There was no over-commercialized advertising. There were some pretty, decorated storefronts.

There were inviting, seasonal touches of red everywhere. The Eagle Lake Civic Garden Club members have been busy as Christmas elves placing wreaths on doors, decorating sidewalk poles and potted shrubbery with red garland and trimmings, with additional decorations extended through the town itself.

It's cozy, small town Christmas, and you can't find that anywhere in that large metropolitan area just east of us.

"Silver bells, silver bells, it's Christmastime in the city..." And in Eagle Lake, Texas.

Views Around The Lake

by Cindy Klopsteck



Store Wide Christmas Sale

The Entire Month of December!

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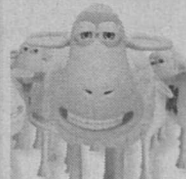
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Banks Completes Basic Training

Army Pvt. Ashley L. Banks has graduated from basic combat training at Fort Jackson, Columbia, SC.

During the nine weeks of training, the soldier studied the Army mission, history, tradition and core values, physical fitness, and

received instruction and practice in basic combat skills, military weapons, chemical warfare and bayonet training, drill and ceremony, marching, rifle marksmanship, armed and unarmed combat, map reading, field tactics, military courtesy, military justice system, basic first aid, foot marches, and

field training exercises.

Banks earned distinction as an honor graduate of the course.

She is the daughter of Pamela Banks-Johnson of Eagle Lake.

The private graduated in 2006 from Rice Consolidated High School in Altair.



Delilah Gentry, Kayli Kallina, and Dynasty Johnson go for a ball during a recent game.

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