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Every time my wife tries to spice up her cooking, I break out in dadburn chives.



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Christmas on Cotita



William Colgin/The Mississippi Press

Elizabeth Frye, 3, tells Santa Claus what she wants for Christmas. For the past six years Daryl Ladnier has dressed as Santa Claus for the children in Hickory Hill.

Hickory Hill Santa helps celebrate the Christmas season

By **CHERIE WARD**
The Mississippi Press

GAUTIER — You don't have to go all the way to the North Pole to tell Santa Claus your Christmas wishes.

Santa Claus actually lives in Gautier, according to Daryl Ladnier, and can't wait for children and their parents to start visiting.

"It's not only for the kids," Ladnier said. "It's just as much for the parents. They get just as excited — if not more."

Ladnier has spent the last six Christmas seasons dressing in a Santa suit and sitting outside his home on Cotita Drive waving to cars as they pass.

With Christmas music echoing throughout a sea of Christmas lights, Ladnier poses for photographs with those who stop and every child gets a candy cane after telling Santa what they want for Christmas.

"It's worth it," Ladnier



William Colgin/The Mississippi Press

Rudolph the Red-Nose Reindeer greets children who come to visit the home of Daryl Ladnier who dresses up as Santa Claus every year.

said. "I enjoy watching the kids faces light up when they see me. To see the happiness something this simple brings is just unreal."

In his seventh year as the

Hickory Hill Santa, Ladnier says a homey environment is sometimes more agreeable for children who are afraid of Ole' Saint Nick.

"I just sit here and let

TO GO

What: Hickory Hill Santa
When: Every night until Christmas beginning at 6 p.m.
Where: Cotita Drive in Gautier

them come up to me," Ladnier said. "It's easier for some kids this way and I like the element of surprise. When the parents pass by and say 'Oh, look, there's Santa,' it's a surprise to the kids and that's the way it should be."

Siblings, Will, 7, Caroline, 4, and Elizabeth Frye, 3, stopped by to tell Santa what presents they would like to open on Christmas morning.

"I want a Battleship game and a Super Mario Brothers game," Will said as Caroline told Santa that she hoped for a Baby Alive doll and Elizabeth asked for a Baby Chew-Chew doll.

Their parents, Chuck and

See **SANTA**, Page 12-A

Woman hopes for happy new year after transplants

By **CHERIE WARD**
The Mississippi Press

GAUTIER — Lavenia Fields said 2006 has been one of the worst years of her life and hopes ringing in the new year will change her luck for the better.

"I'm ready to see this year go," Fields said.

She was diagnosed with Hepatitis C in April, which Fields said resulted in a liver and kidney transplant in August.

"I was sick all the time and I couldn't shake it," Fields said. "For two years I felt like I had something wrong, but didn't know what. There are worst things than being a drunk."

She said she went to the emergency room at Singing River Hospital in Pascagoula and was told she had pneumo-

TO HELP

Visit any Hancock Bank branch and ask to donate to Lavenia Fields' account.

nia, shingles, a urinary track infection and a kidney infection.

"I thought well that's why I feel so bad all the time," Fields said.

While waiting for the doctor to return with test results, Fields said she thought everything could be treated easily and she would finally feel normal again.

"Then after more test things just got worse," she said.

Fields said she was told by the emergency room doctor about her kidney and liver fail-

See **TRANSPLANTS**, Page 12-A

Coast native Lott releases record to help Red Cross

By **KATHY HANRAHAN**
The Associated Press

JACKSON — Chet Lott remembers the good times as a child growing up in his family's home in Pascagoula near the normally tranquil Gulf of Mexico.

Now, those memories include the nightmare of Hurricane Katrina.

In the hours after the storm smashed into the Gulf Coast, the 39-year-old son of U.S. Sen. Trent Lott, R-Miss., returned to check on the home many called "Lott's Landing." He found the 1800s structure had been no match for Katrina — all that remained was a debris covered lot.

"I didn't know what to do. I felt helpless. I thought, 'what can I do,'" Lott said.

A part-time musician, Lott did do something — he returned to his home in Kentucky and composed a song called "Erased It." The song soon became an inspiration for a larger project — a full length album by the same name to benefit the American Red Cross.

The 11-month project was

just released.

Lott describes the title track as an "upbeat blues song."

"Even though it was the blues it doesn't have to be the depressing blues," Lott said. "Let's get mad at the storm."

Lott said he began writing songs for the album and selecting tracks to cover including "Knocking on Heaven's Door," "Light My Fire" and "Tupelo Honey."

"Every song that I covered I tried to put the 'Chet Lott' influence on," he said.

Original songs on the album include "Where Am I From" and "Welcome to Mississippi," both of which Lott says celebrate his home state.

Production on the album started in Lexington, Ky. in January with former lead singer/guitarist and songwriter of the band Exile J.P. Pennington donating his talents as producer. Pennington penned the Exile's hit: "Kiss You All Over."

"I got a soft spot in my

See **LOTT**, Page 12-A

The quest to identify two of Katrina's nameless dead

By **RUKMINI CALLIMACHI**
The Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Water is unforgiving to the dead and by the time the crews arrived, the men were missing their eyes.

Carefully, the workers slipped them into black, zippered bags, placed them inside a van and drove them 70 miles to an emergency morgue which had been set up inside a refrigerated tent. Over the months that followed, investigators cut them, prodded them, photographed them, X-rayed them and removed pieces of their DNA, all in an attempt to coax their bodies into spitting out

names.

In neat rows beside them are the coffins of 27 other anonymous souls, their bodies stuck in a forensic purgatory — unknown, unclaimed and unable to be buried more than 15 months after Hurricane Katrina made landfall.

There were those among Katrina's dead who succumbed alongside people they knew; slips of paper or damp cardboard, inscribed with their names, were tucked into their clothes. But many more drowned alone, their bodies drifting in the black water, getting snagged on fence posts,

coming to rest beneath freeway overpasses, in the rubble of uprooted homes.

It's a fate which continues to torture the living as they struggle to give the dead what the dead are owed.

A body can only say so much about itself. It can tell its sex, for instance, its height, a race. Bones can speak of past accidents.

But the elements and simple decay can erase much of the rest. More than a week passed before the first crew arrived to retrieve the more than 1,300 people who died in Louisiana and by that time, many of the bodies were

bloated beyond recognition.

Besides their eyes, the two men were missing their finger- and toenails. Soaking in the coarse water, their skin color changed; the workers who retrieved them couldn't tell if the men were black or white.

The two bodies had been lying in the mud inside the locked apartment at 224 De La Ronde Drive for at least 16 days when the white, unmarked van pulled up.

With orders to save the living, See **DEAD**, Page 4-A



AP

New Orleans Coroner Dr. Frank Minyard poses inside the New Orleans Forensic Center in New Orleans on Nov. 9, 2006. One of Dr. Minyard's primary jobs, 15 months after Hurricane Katrina hit the New Orleans area, continues to be identifying the dead left by the storm.

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