

Groton Daily Independent

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Fri., Dec. 26

Senior Menu: Hamburger cabbage roll hot dish, mixed vegetables, fruit, cornmeal muffin.
No School

Sat., Dec. 27

Sun., Dec. 28

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; No Sunday School.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion, 11 a.m.

United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.

Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.

4th Grade BB Practice, 2 p.m.

6th Grade Boys Basketball, 6 p.m.

Mon, Dec. 29

Senior Menu: Sweet and sour pork, steamed rice, carrot and broccoli medley, corn, fruit.

No School

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

Floyd Farrand Tournament Girls Wrestling at SF Lincoln, 9 a.m.

5th/6th Volleyball Practice, 6 p.m.



Tues., Dec. 30

Senior Menu: Meat loaf, baked potato, mixed vegetables, fruit, whole wheat bread.

No School

GBB NSU Showcase, Groton vs. Lemmon, 3 p.m.

Boys BB hosts Webster (JV at 6 p.m., Varsity to follow)

7th Grade Girls Soccer Practice, 6 p.m.

Wed., Dec. 31

Groton Daily Independent
PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445
Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460

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Christmas is a time for miracles, and the Vikings' Christmas Day game against the Detroit Lions was no exception. Somehow, some way, the Vikings were able to pull off the 23-10 win against a Detroit team that was desperate to win and keep their postseason dreams alive. With J.J. McCarthy sitting this game out with an injured hand, undrafted rookie Max Brosmer once again got the start. It wasn't pretty. The Vikings had three(!) net passing yards (passing yards minus yards lost from sacks) in the win, which no team in the NFL has done since 1983. The story of the game was the defense, however, which forced six turnovers and suffocated Detroit's normally explosive offense, holding them to only 231 total yards,

their lowest mark of the season.

The Vikings won the coin toss and elected to receive the opening kickoff, but were forced to punt three plays later. On their second possession, the Vikings' offense started showing signs of life, mixing in runs by Aaron Jones and passes to Justin Jefferson, but a sack on third down took them out of field goal range. A Jared Goff fumble gave the Vikings excellent field position, which they turned into a touchdown to take a 7-0 lead.

Jahmyr Gibbs fumbled on Detroit's next drive, his first lost fumble of the season. Despite starting their next possession at the edge of field goal range, the Vikings went backwards, so they had to punt. The Lions' defense started to swing the momentum, and then Detroit's offense finally started to get its act together with a 19-play, 80-yard touchdown drive that took over 10 minutes off the clock. The Vikings got the ball back with a minute left in the half but couldn't do anything with it, and both teams went into halftime tied 7-7.

Both teams traded punts to open the second half, and then Byron Murphy intercepted Goff to give the ball back to Minnesota, who added three more points to the scoreboard with a 52-yard field goal. On Detroit's very next play, Goff was intercepted again, this time by the ageless wonder Harrison Smith, and the Vikings put three more points on the board to take a 13-7 lead.

The Vikings' defense forced ANOTHER turnover on the next drive when Andrew Van Ginkel and Dallas Turner converged on Goff for a sack fumble, which was recovered by Jalen Redmond. The next three drives ended with a punt, and before we knew it, the fourth quarter was already half over. Despite the uncharacteristic turnovers by the Lions, it was still a one-score game at this point. The Lions kicked a field goal on their next drive to cut the lead to three points, and things started to look dicey for Minnesota. However, on their next drive, Jordan Addison took an end-around 65 yards for a touchdown, giving the Vikings a little breathing room and a two-score lead with under four minutes left in the game. Goff fumbled on Detroit's next drive, their sixth turnover of the game, and the Vikings ran two minutes off the clock before kicking another field goal to seal the game.

Max Brosmer completed 9 of 16 passes for 51 yards. Aaron Jones had 18 carries for 53 yards and a touchdown. Justin Jefferson had four catches for 30 yards.

The offense might have been anemic, but the defense played lights out. They forced and recovered four fumbles to go along with two interceptions, five sacks, eight tackles for a loss, five pass deflections, and eight QB hits.

The player of the game was Harrison Smith. There were several players on the Vikings' defense to choose from, but I wanted to shout out Smith, who was likely playing in his second-to-last game in his storied career. In my mind, he's a Hall of Fame-worthy player, so I was happy to see him pad his stats and strengthen his case.

Minnesota is now 8-8 this season with one game remaining on its schedule. They are also tied with Detroit in the NFC North, so if they can win their final game, they'll avoid finishing last in the toughest division in the NFL. The Vikings close out the season with a home matchup against the Green Bay Packers. The game time hasn't been released yet, so keep your eyes out for that announcement from the league.

Presidential Message on Christmas

NEWS PROVIDED BY

The White House

Dec. 25, 2025

WASHINGTON, Dec. 25, 2025 /Christian Newswire/ — The White House releases the following from the President of the United States of America:

The First Lady and I send our warmest wishes to all Americans as we share in the joy of Christmas Day and celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The story of the Christmas miracle begins more than 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem, when angels appeared to humble shepherds to share the good news of a child born to bring hope to the world, declaring, "Glory to God in the highest." Guided by a magnificent star, the shepherds traveled a great distance to gather around a crowded manger where, in the dark of night alongside Mary and Joseph, they knelt before the Light of the World, the source of eternal salvation, and the living Son of God.

The birth of Jesus revealed the perfect expression of God's boundless love and His desire to be close to His people. More than two centuries later, we continue to rejoice in the gift of God's only begotten Son as the graces of Christ's life, death, and resurrection continue to pour out upon all who believe.

This Christmas, we also give thanks for the many blessings that God has bestowed upon our great Nation. For nearly 250 years, the principles of faith, family, and freedom have remained at the center of our way of life. As President, I will never waver in defending the fundamental values that make America the greatest country in the history of the world—and we will always remain one Nation under God.

Today, especially, we also remember the brave men and women of our Armed Forces who are unable to be with their families. While their solemn mission keeps them far from home this Christmas, their service and sacrifice protect our freedom and allow Americans all across our country to celebrate in safety and peace. We are grateful for their devotion, and we keep them and their loved ones close in our hearts.

During the Christmas season, we pray for an outpouring of God's abiding love, divine mercy, and everlasting peace upon our country and the entire world. To every American, and to those celebrating around the globe, we wish you a very Merry Christmas!

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Bittersweet Christmas

By Aaron Grant

Many of us do not need to be told that Christmas can be a tough time of the year. For those in deep depression, it is the very season of giving, of rejoicing that can be the hardest. Especially if they feel alone.

Many of us don't have to be told that Christmas is sometimes bittersweet. When we were children, it was perfect at least in our minds and expectations, and the younger we were the simpler it was. But when we get older people fall off. We grow apart and sometimes never speak. We have a web called "life" and all the sudden that tree though beautiful in every respect reminds us equally of what we have, and what we do not. The best word may be bittersweet, but Christmas means something a little different for every soul that aches for what we no longer have, and who is no longer with us.

Many do not have to be told that that one person who called weekly has passed on, and your phone no longer rings. It could be anybody. A grandfather for me, a sister for you, or parents that gave everything so you might have a happy Christmas. You save those voicemails and listen to that voice sometimes, and it is bittersweet. The voicemail one day disappears, and you catch yourself wondering a few years later what they sounded like.

Many don't have to say they give it all to the children. You remember those early days, and they deserve it too: all those presents because giving is important. Joy covers up any sadness especially on Christmas morning, and for precious moments all memory is redirected to the best you have - those with you, and even those missing that will receive a phone call.

Many do not have to say giving does feel good. Especially when what you're giving is the best you have. Not just presents, but a whole year of giving to the people about you, even if it's doing your best for people you don't like; or people who hate you. But giving without expecting a reward, giving without reciprocation, giving while no one is looking; these are the best of all when we look in the mirror.

And, many don't have to say there's someone we ought to call - someone we would like to speak with even though the hurt has happened.

But there is no better day for hope. There is no better day for the present. There is no better day than Christmas for the best gift you can give. No. Christmas is not all about you. So, make that call. Make that visit. Even a Christmas truce was good enough on the western front. Now it is 2025, not 1914, and we have more reason than ever to give.

Merry Christmas especially to the wayward, you are not alone. Merry Christmas to the blessed, it is never too late to bless another.

-A.M. Grant

By design, Aaron "Hammer" Grant
Staff NCO - U.S. Marine Corps
Author, Teacher, Master of Military History
Commandant, J. R. Moore Marines
Legion V. Cmdr. SD
Past Cmdr. V.F.W.
Certified Counselor for Combat Trauma (NYCPS)

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for details



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Family is \$67.10 per month or \$702.26 per year

Month-to-Month Rates

Student is \$35.15 per month
Single is \$40.48 per month
2-Person is \$59.78 per month
Family is \$72.43 per month

**While many other rates have gone up, ours has not.
Same rates for several years!**



COMMENTARY

How nostalgia led to the invention of the first Christmas card by Christopher Ferguson

It's a common seasonal refrain: "Christmas just isn't like it used to be."

This is not a new complaint. History shows that Christmas traditions are just as subject to change as any other aspect of human societies, and when customs change, there are always some who wish they could turn back the clock.

In the 1830s, the English solicitor William Sandys compiled a host of examples of Britons bemoaning the transformation of Christmas customs—from earlier eras. Sandys himself was especially concerned about the decline of public caroling, noting the practice appeared "to get more neglected every year." He worried that this "neglect" was indicative of a wider British tendency to observe Christmas with less "hospitality and innocent revelry" in the 19th century than in the past.

Yet the 19th century also produced new holiday customs. In fact, many of the new Christmas practices in Sandys's time went on to become established traditions themselves – and are now the subject of nostalgia and fretted over by those who fear their decline. Take, for example, the humble Christmas card. My research shows that these printed seasonal greetings borrowed from the customs of the past to move Christmas into a new age.



The first Christmas card with the words "A Merry Christmas and A Happy New Year to You." (Artist John Callcott Horsley via Wikimedia Commons)

A British tradition

Annual sales and circulation of Christmas cards have been in decline since the 1990s. Laments over the potential "death" of the Christmas card have been especially vocal in the United Kingdom, where the mailing of Christmas greetings to family and friends via printed cards was long considered to be an essential element of a "British Christmas."

Indeed, historians Martin Johnes and Mark Connelly both argue that throughout the 20th century the Christmas card was viewed as just as essential a part of Britain's distinctive blend of holiday traditions as children hanging stockings at the end of their beds, Christmas pantomimes, and the eating of turkey and Brussels sprouts.

Yet, as these same historians are quick to note, at one time Britons did none of these things at Christmas. Each of these traditions became an element of the customary British Christmas only during the second half of the 19th century and the early decades of the 20th.

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This makes them all relatively new additions to the country's holiday customs, especially when viewed in light of Christmas' more than 2,000-year history.

Industrial revolution and Christmas cards

The custom of mailing printed Christmas cards began in the middle decades of the 19th century and was a product of the industrial revolution. It was made affordable by new innovations in printing and papermaking and more efficient modes of transportation such as the railway.

The development of this new tradition was also facilitated by Parliament's introduction of the Penny Post in 1840, which allowed Britons to mail letters to any address in the United Kingdom for the small price of a penny stamp.

Most historians date the Christmas card's arrival to 1843, the same year in which Charles Dickens published "A Christmas Carol."

In that year, the inventor and civil servant Henry Cole commissioned the artist John Callcott Horsley to design a card to help Cole handle his Christmas correspondence more efficiently.

Printed versions of Cole's card were also made available for sale, but the high price of one shilling apiece left them outside the bounds of affordability for most of the Victorian population.

Cole's experiment, however, inspired other printers to produce similar but more affordable Christmas cards. The use of these cheaper cards began to spread in the 1850s and had established itself as a holiday tradition by the final decades of the century.



First world postal stamp – the Penny Black. General Post Office of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland via Wikimedia Commons

A Victorian invention?

While the Christmas card may have seemed like an entirely new invention to Victorian senders and receivers, the first Christmas card's design was actually influenced by other, older British holiday traditions.

As historians Timothy Larsen and the late Neil Armstrong have demonstrated, Christmas' status as an established holiday meant that new Christmas customs developed during the 19th century needed to connect with, supplement or replace already existing traditions. The Christmas card was no exception to this recorded pattern.

In 1843, many Britons bemoaned the disappearance of a variety of "Old English" Christmas customs. Foremost among these were traditions of Christmas "hospitality," including Christmas and New Year's visiting, when family, friends and neighbors went to each other's homes to drink toasts and offer best wishes for the holiday and the coming year.

Scholars argue popular belief in these traditions depended on a mixture of recalled reality and constructed fictions. Foremost among the latter were the popular stories depicting "old English hospitality" at Christmas by the American writer Washington Irving, published in the 1820s. In fact, Britons regularly invoked Irving's accounts of Christmas at the fictional country house, Bracebridge Hall, when debating the changing character of their nation's Christmas observances.

Regardless of these "old" customs' historical reality, they nevertheless came to feature prominently in discussions regarding the supposed disappearance of a range of community level Christmas observances, including feasting, caroling and public acts of charity.

All of these, it was believed, were endangered in an increasingly urban Britain characterized by class tensions, heightened population mobility and mass anonymity.

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A union of the old and the new

While it is unclear whether these ongoing debates inspired Cole's decision to commission his 1843 Christmas card, the illustration Horsley designed for him alluded to them directly.

The card features a family framed by trestles adorned with holly and mistletoe, accompanied on either side by charitable scenes involving the feeding and clothing of the poor. The center of the card – and the symbolic center of Horsley's Christmas vision – however, is the family of three clearly defined generations enjoying a collective feast, including the classic English Christmas pudding.

They face the viewer, their glasses raised in a toast, directly above a banner wishing them a "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year." The central visual imagery of the card – as a "paper visitor" to the home of the recipient – replicates the social act of toasting associated with the older custom of holiday visits.

In fact, Horsley's design invoked many of the same elements featured in Irving's stories. This is not surprising, given that in later life Horsley recalled the impact of reading Irving's depictions of the "Christmas at Bracebridge Hall" as a boy, and how he and his sister Fanny had been "determined to do our best to keep Christmas in such a notable fashion."



An illustration by artist Randolph Caldecott summarizing the range of 'old English Christmas traditions.' © The Trustees of the British Museum, CC BY-NC-SA

Refashioning 'old English hospitality'

Early Christmas cards favored similar imagery associated with the "Old English" Christmas of carolers, acts of charity, the playing of country sports, games such as blindman's bluff, copious greenery, feasting and the toasting of Christmas and the New Year.

These Christmas cards were thus novel, industrial products adorned with the imagery of British Christmases past.

The development, and ultimate triumph, of the Christmas card in Victorian Britain demonstrates how nostalgia was channeled into invention. The Christmas card did not revitalize the traditions of Christmas and New Year's visiting; it offered a paper replacement for them.

Industrial production and transportation transformed the physical visitor into a paper proxy, allowing more people to visit many more of the homes of others during the holiday season than they ever would have been able to in person.

The desire to hold on to one element of an older, supposedly declining Christmas tradition thus proved instrumental in helping to create a new holiday tradition in the midst of unprecedented changes in the character of communications and social relations.

Today, a similar context of social and technological changes has caused some to predict the "death" of the Christmas card. The history of the 19th century suggests, however, that should the tradition die,

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whatever replaces it will thrive by drawing selectively on the Christmas customs of the past.

Christopher Ferguson is a historian of modern Britain, with special interests in the period c. 1780-c. 1870, urban history, autobiography and other ego documents, and material culture. He joined the Auburn University faculty in 2008, after completing his Ph.D. in British and cultural history at Indiana University, where he also received an interdisciplinary minor in Victorian studies.



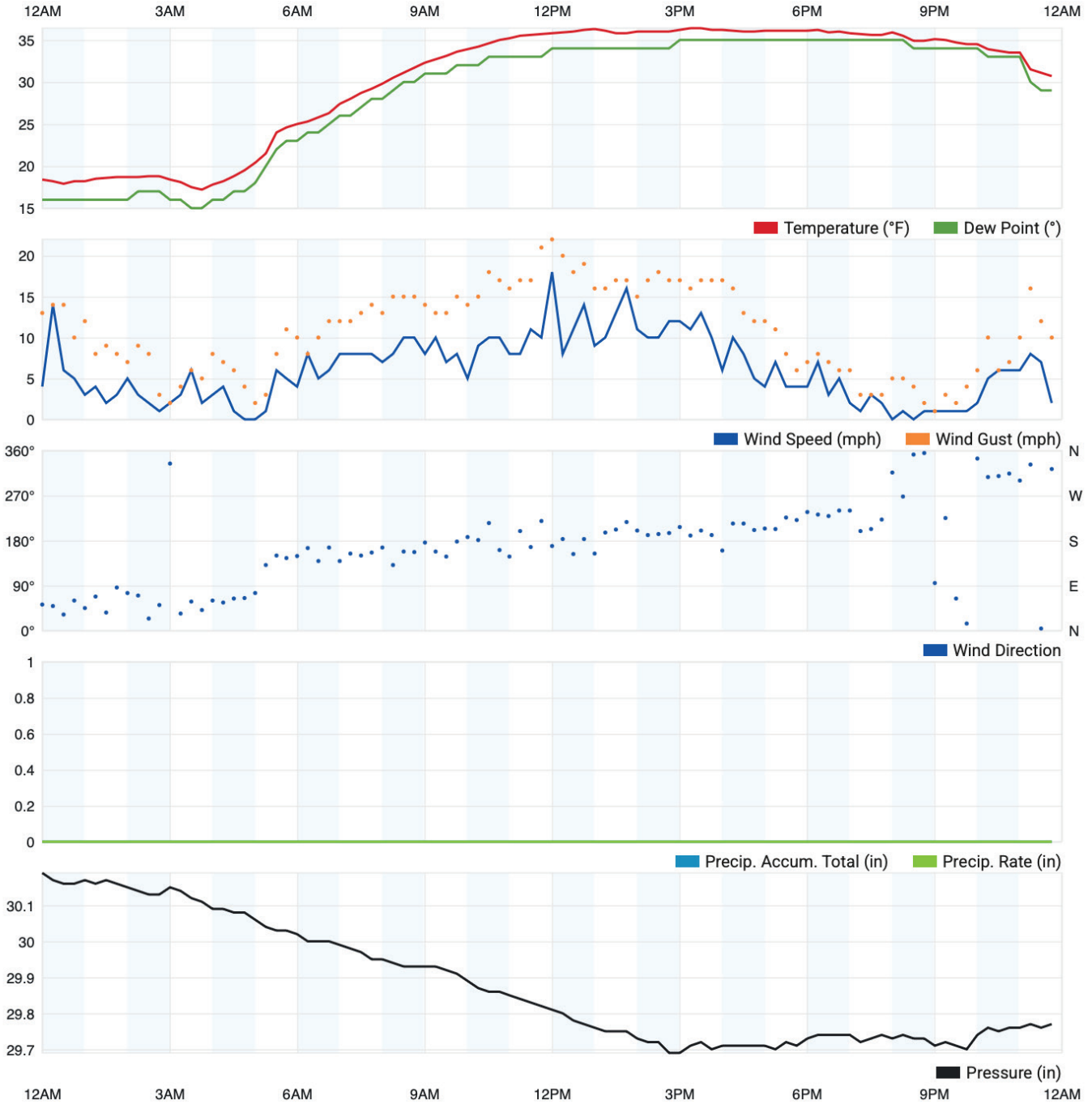
A Christmas card. British Museum, Artist William Maw Egley., CC BY-NC-SA

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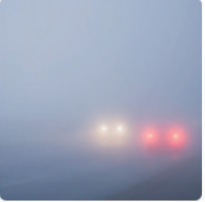


Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

December 25, 2025




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Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
				
High: 33 °F	Low: 27 °F	High: 37 °F	Low: 9 °F	High: 16 °F
Patchy Dense Fog	Patchy Fog	Patchy Fog	Mostly Cloudy then Slight Chance Snow and Blustery	Blustery. Slight Chance Snow then Mostly Cloudy

Today




30-53°

-Warmest over south central SD

-Patchy to Dense fog will remain possible through the evening.

-Dense fog and temperatures below freezing could create pockets of freezing fog

Weekend Outlook

<i>Sat</i>	<i>Sun</i>
	
40-54°	10-20°
	Gusty Winds

15-25% chance for light snow Saturday evening into Sunday

December 26, 2025 3:31 AM



NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

weather.gov/abr

Patchy to dense fog will remain possible through the evening, and during the morning when temperature are below freezing, there could be pockets of freezing fog. This freezing fog could create slick roads and surface. Partly cloudy skies on Saturday will lead to a 15-25% chance for light snow Saturday night into Sunday. Behind the snow, temperatures will drop and winds will pick up.

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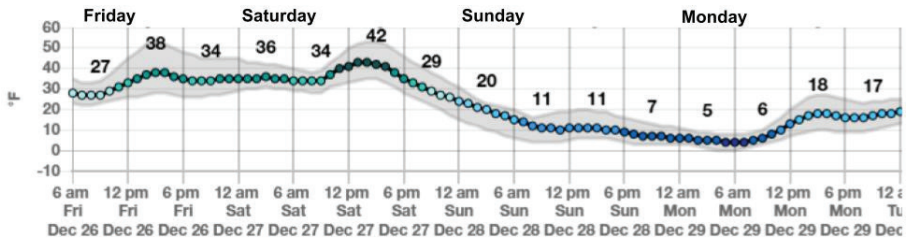


Upcoming Temperature Drop

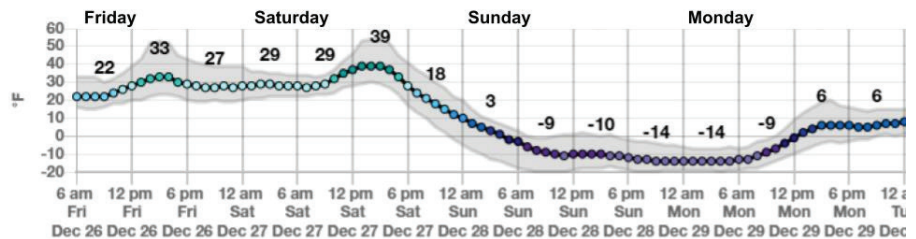
December 26, 2025
3:31 AM

- Temperatures will start dropping overnight Saturday into Sunday
 - Wind chills will also drop into the negative teens Sunday night into Monday morning
- Winds will start to increase late Saturday evening through Sunday
 - Gust around 40-50 mph

Regional Temperature Forecast



Regional Wind Chill Forecast



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Temperatures will start dropping overnight Saturday into Sunday. Winds will also start to increase during that time, with gusts getting up around 40-50 mph. These winds will cause wind chills to drop, with the coldest dropping into the negative teens being between Sunday night into Monday morning.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 36 °F at 3:18 PM

Low Temp: 17 °F at 3:42 AM

Wind: 22 mph at 11:54 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 53 in 2011

Record Low: -29 in 1990

Average High: 25

Average Low: 5

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.50

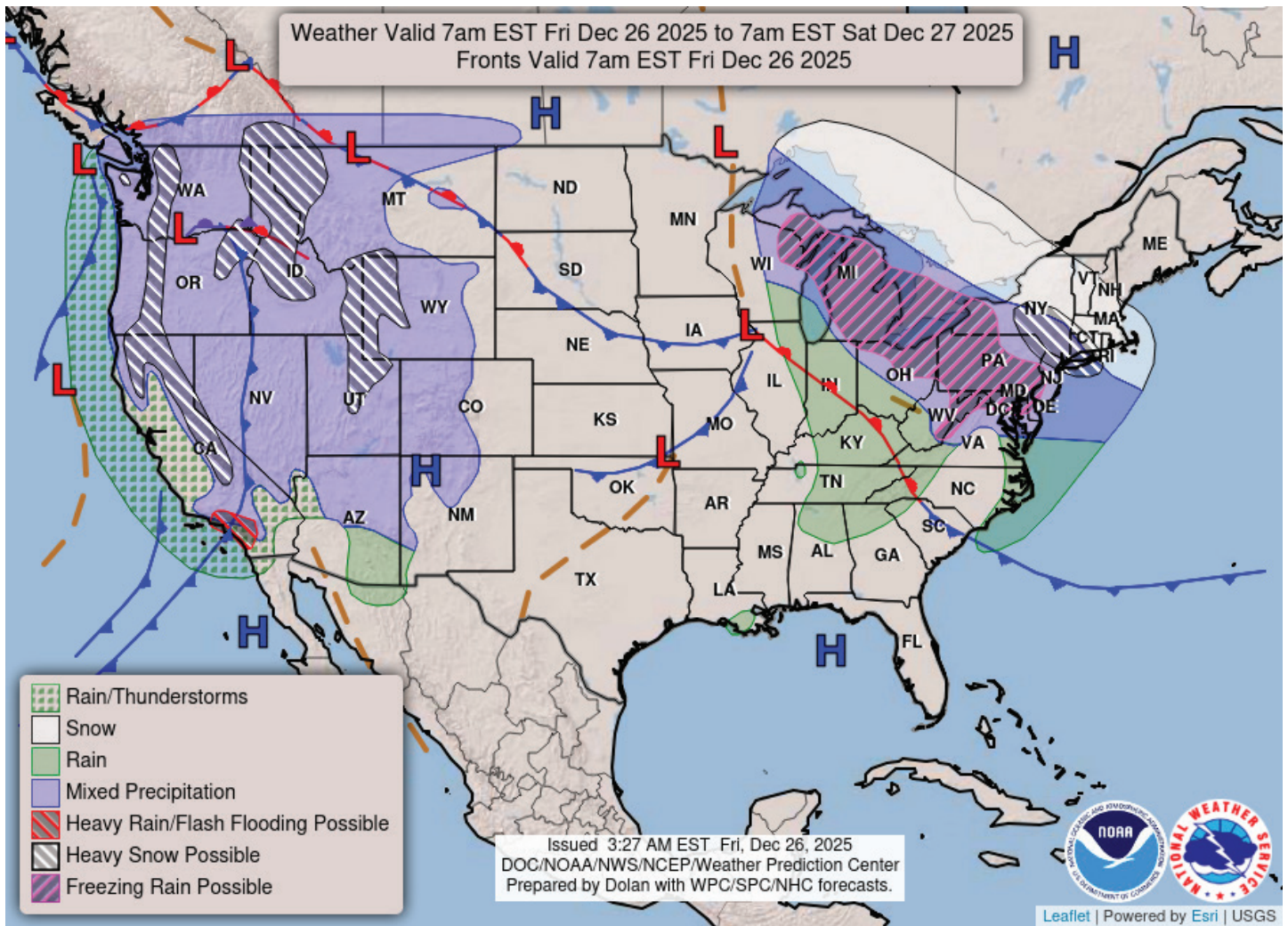
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.67

Average Precip to date: 21.71

Precip Year to Date: 25.48

Sunset Tonight: 4:54 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:11 am



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Today in Weather History

December 26, 1988: Moderate to heavy snow fell across western and northern South Dakota, as well as across most of Minnesota, from the evening of the 25th through the morning of the 27th. Much of the northern one-half to two-thirds of Minnesota and the western and northern sections of South Dakota were blanketed with 6-12 inches of new snow. Numerous accidents and minor injuries were indirectly related to the snowy conditions. Several snowfall amounts in South Dakota included 12 inches at Timber Lake; 10 to 12 inches at Seneca and Hoven; 11 inches at Aberdeen; 8 inches at Pierre, Eureka and Blunt; 7 inches at Chelsea, Redfield, Cottonwood, and Rapid City; and 6 inches at Ferney, Huron, and Eden. In Minnesota, 8 inches fell in Browns Valley, 6 inches fell at Wheaton, and 5 inches accumulated at Artichoke Lake.

December 26, 1776: George Washington crossed the ice-clogged Delaware River. He marched on Trenton in the midst of snow and sleet thus surprising and captured many of the British garrisons.

1947 — New York City received a record 26.4 inches of snow in 24 hours, with as much as 32 inches reported in the suburbs. The heavy snow brought traffic to a standstill, and snow removal cost eight million dollars. Thirty thousand persons were called upon to remove the 100 million tons of snow. The storm claimed 27 lives. (26th-27th) (David Ludlum)

1983 — Miami, FL, established a December record with a morning low of 33 degrees. Just three days earlier, and again three days later, record warm temperatures were reported in Florida, with daytime highs in the 80s. (The National Weather Summary)

1987 — Freezing rain plagued parts of the south central U.S., from northwest Texas to southwestern Missouri. Southwestern Missouri was turned into a huge skating rink as roads became sheets of ice. Damage to tree limbs and power lines compared to a hundred tornadoes, and half of the city of Springfield was left without electricity for 24 hours. Snow, sleet and ice covered the northwest two thirds of Oklahoma. 75,000 homes were left without electricity as ice accumulated one to two inches in a 40-mile band from Duncan to Norman to Tulsa to Miami. 25,000 of those homes were still without power a week later. The storm claimed the lives of seven persons. (24th-27th) (The Weather Channel) (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 — Low pressure produced heavy snow from North Dakota to western sections of the Great Lakes Region, with up to fourteen inches reported in the Chicago area. Cold arctic air hovered over the Plateau Region. Temperatures in the Big Smokey Valley of Nevada plunged to 31 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 — Strong northerly winds behind an arctic cold front produced snow squalls in the Great Lakes Region and dangerous wind chill temperatures in the northeastern U.S. Wind chill readings as cold as 40 degrees below zero were reported in New York State. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2003 — A major snow storm in Utah caused several fatalities due to avalanches. As much as 2 ft of snow fell in parts of the state, particularly south of Salt Lake City. Three people that were seen snowboarding in the Aspen Grove recreational area have been presumed dead, all others managed to escape or be rescued (Reuters).

December 26, 2004: A magnitude 9.1 earthquake near Sumatra, Indonesia generated a tsunami that caused tremendous devastation throughout the Indian Ocean. The quake, which is the third largest in the world since 1900, caused severe damage and casualties in northern Sumatra, Indonesia, and in the Nicobar Islands, India. The tsunami that followed killed more people than any other tsunami in recorded history, with 227,898 dead or missing. The total estimated material losses in the Indian Ocean region were \$10 billion, and insured losses were \$2 billion.

The Ruin of Rebellion

Choosing to sin causes us to miss the good gifts our Father longs to give.

Galatians 6:7-10: 7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.

8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

9 Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.

10 So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

Rebelling against God is costly. As Dr. Stanley taught, people reap what they sow, more than they sow, and later than they sow.

Many people believe that rules prevent us from having a good time. That is certainly not the Lord's intention. In fact, He offers us true freedom through a relationship with Him. Our loving Father desires to keep His children growing in their faith and safe from harmful temptations. He does that by limiting our actions and teaching us to follow certain laws and principles, which He has designed for our good. There is no greater pleasure or source of contentment than serving Him.

But when we rebel and defy the Lord's authority in some area of our life, we allow the Enemy to shackle us. We may not initially feel the constraint he puts on us, but keep in mind that the consequences for those choices will always be unpleasant. Whether they impact the body, mind, heart, or spirit, we will find ourselves distracted from wholly serving the Lord (Matthew 6:24).

God takes disobedience seriously because the consequences are grave. As our loving Father, He has only our best in mind. So rebelling against Him is unprofitable. Wise men and women live by His Word and obey Him in love (John 14:21; John 14:23-24).

We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him

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Password _____

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Pay with Venmo: @paperpaul Phone Number to Confirm: 7460



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MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.23.25

15 37 38 41 64 21

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$125,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 24 Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.24.25

1 18 27 41 49 9

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$10,720,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 39 Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.24.25

3 5 7 17 34 9

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: Stay Tuned

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.24.25

1 2 3 7 32

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$152,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 54 Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.24.25

3 15 19 29 35 21

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 23 Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.24.25

4 25 31 52 59 19

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 23 Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Japan's Cabinet OKs record defense budget that aims to deter China

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's Cabinet on Friday approved a record defense budget plan exceeding 9 trillion yen (\$58 billion) for the coming year, aiming to fortify its strike-back capability and coastal defense with cruise missiles and unmanned arsenals as tensions rise in the region.

The draft budget for fiscal 2026 beginning April is up 9.4% from 2025 and marks the fourth year of Japan's ongoing five-year program to double annual arms spending to 2% of gross domestic product.

The increase comes as Japan faces elevated tension from China. Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said in November that her country's military could get involved if China were to take action against Taiwan, the self-governing island that Beijing says must come under its rule.

Takaichi's government, under U.S. pressure for a military increase, pledged to achieve the 2% target by March, two years earlier than planned. Japan also plans to revise the ongoing security and defense policy by December 2026 to further strengthen its military.

Missiles and drones will add to southwestern island defense

Japan has been bolstering its offensive capability with long-range missiles to attack enemy targets from a distance, a major break from its post-World War II principle limiting the use of force to own self-defense.

The current security strategy, adopted in 2022, names China as the country's biggest strategic challenge and calls for a more offensive role for Japan's Self-Defense Force under its security alliance with the U.S.

The new budget plan allocates more than 970 billion yen (\$6.2 billion) to bolster Japan's "standoff" missile capability. It includes a 177 billion-yen (\$1.13 billion) purchase of domestically developed and upgraded Type-12 surface-to-ship missiles with a range of about 1,000 kilometers (620 miles).

The first batch of the Type-12 missiles will be deployed in Japan's southwestern Kumamoto prefecture by March, a year earlier than planned, as Japan accelerates its missile buildup in the region.

In part due to Japan's aging and declining population and its struggles with an understaffed military, the government believes unmanned weapons are essential.

To defend the coasts, Japan will spend 100 billion yen (\$640 million) to deploy "massive" unmanned air, sea-surface and underwater drones for surveillance and defense under a system called "SHIELD" planned for March 2028, defense ministry officials said.

For speedier deployment, Japan initially plans to rely mainly on imports, possibly from Turkey or Israel.

Tension with China grows

The budget announcement comes as Japan's row with China escalate following Takaichi's remark in November that Japanese military could get involved if China were to take action against Taiwan, the self-governing island that Beijing claims as its own.

The disagreement escalated this month when Chinese aircraft carrier drills near southwestern Japan prompted Tokyo to protest when Chinese aircraft locked their radar on Japanese aircraft, which is considered possible preparation for firing missiles.

The Defense Ministry, already been alarmed by China's rapid expansion of operations in the Pacific, will open a new office dedicated to studying operations, equipment and other necessities for Japan to deal with China's Pacific activity.

Two Chinese aircraft carriers were spotted in June almost simultaneously operating near southern Japanese island of Iwo Jima for the first time, fueling Tokyo's concern about Beijing's rapidly expanding military activity far beyond its borders and areas around the disputed East China Sea islands.

In Beijing, China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said the Takaichi government has "noticeably accelerated its pace of military buildup and expansion" since taking office.

"Japan is deviating from the path of peaceful development it has long claimed to uphold and is moving further and further in a dangerous direction," Lin said.

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Japan plans joint development of frigates and jets

Japan is pushing to strengthen its largely domestic defense industry by participating in joint development with friendly nations, and promoting foreign sales, after drastically easing arms export restrictions in recent years.

For 2026, Japan plans to spend more than 160 billion yen (\$1 billion) to jointly develop a next-generation fighter jet with Britain and Italy for deployment in 2035. There also are plans for research and development of AI-operated drones designed to fly with the jet.

In a major boost to the country's defense industry, Australia selected Mitsubishi Heavy Industries in August to upgrade Mogami-class frigate to replace its fleet of 11 ANZAC-class ships.

Japan's budget allocates nearly 10 billion yen (\$64 million) to support industry base and arms sales.

Meeting targets but future funding uncertain

The budget plan requires parliamentary approval by March to be implemented as part of a 122.3 trillion yen (\$784 billion) national budget bill.

The five-year defense buildup program would bring Japan's annual spending to around 10 trillion yen (\$64 billion), making it the world's third-largest spender after the U.S. and China. Japan will clear the 2% target by March as promised, the Finance Ministry said.

Takaichi's government plans to fund its growing military spending by raising corporate and tobacco taxes and recently adopted a plan for income tax increase beginning 2027. Prospects for future growth at a higher percentage of GDP is unclear.

New storm hitting waterlogged Southern California could bring mudslides and high surf

By TY ONEIL Associated Press

WRIGHTWOOD, Calif. (AP) — California, soaked from days of relentless rain and recovering from mudslides in mountain towns, was hit with another powerful storm Christmas Day that led to evacuation warnings and high surf advisories.

The San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department in Southern California issued an evacuation warning for Wrightwood, a mountain town about 80 miles (130 kilometers) northeast of Los Angeles, a day after rescuing people trapped in cars during a mud slide.

The National Weather Service said waves near the San Francisco Bay Area could reach up to 25 feet (7.6 meters) Friday.

Statewide, more than 70,000 people were without power Thursday afternoon, according to PowerOutage.us.

A day ago, heavy rain and fierce winds were blamed for at least two deaths.

A major storm system moving toward the Midwest and Northeast was expected to interfere with travel, according to the National Weather Service.

A mix of freezing rain and sleet could create icy conditions in Pennsylvania, Michigan and Maryland. Forecasters warned heavy ice could cause outages. Snow was expected to blanket the Northeast early Friday.

Roads in the 5,000-resident California town of Wrightwood were covered in rocks, debris and thick mud on Thursday. With power out, a gas station and coffee shop running on generators were serving as hubs for residents and visitors.

"It's really a crazy Christmas," said Jill Jenkins, who was spending the holiday with her 13-year-old grandson, Hunter Lopiccolo.

Lopiccolo said the family almost evacuated the previous day, when water washed away a chunk of their backyard. But they decided to stay and still celebrated the holiday. Lopiccolo got a new snowboard and e-bike.

"We just played card games all night with candles and flashlights," he said.

Davey Schneider hiked a mile and a half (1.6 kilometers) through rain and floodwater up to his shins from his Wrightwood residence Wednesday to rescue cats from his grandfather's house.

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"I wanted to help them out because I wasn't confident that they were going to live," Schneider said Thursday. "Fortunately, they all lived. They're all okay — just a little bit scared."

Arlene Corte said roads in town turned into rivers, but her house was not damaged.

"It could be a whole lot worse," she said. "We're here talking."

With more rain on the way, more than 150 firefighters were stationed in the area, said San Bernardino County Fire spokesman Shawn Millerick.

"We're ready," he said. "It's all hands on deck at this point."

A falling tree killed a San Diego man Wednesday, news outlets reported. Farther north, a Sacramento sheriff's deputy died in what appeared to be a weather-related crash.

Areas along the coast, including Malibu, were under a flood watch until Friday afternoon, and wind and flood advisories were issued for much of the Sacramento Valley and the San Francisco Bay Area.

The storms were the result of atmospheric rivers carrying massive plumes of moisture from the tropics during one of the busiest travel weeks of the year.

Southern California typically gets half an inch to 1 inch (1.3 to 2.5 centimeters) of rain this time of year, but this week many areas could see between 4 and 8 inches (10 to 20 centimeters), with even more in the mountains, National Weather Service meteorologist Mike Wofford said.

More heavy snow was expected in the Sierra Nevada, where gusts created "near white-out conditions" and made mountain pass travel treacherous. Officials said there was a "high" avalanche risk around Lake Tahoe and a winter storm warning was in effect through Friday.

Ski resorts around Lake Tahoe recorded about 1 to 3 feet (30 to 91 centimeters) of snow overnight, said Tyler Salas, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Reno. Forecasters expect to see up to another 3 feet (91 centimeters) of snow through Friday, Salas said. The area could see 45-mph (72-kph) gusts in low elevation areas and 100-mph (161-kph) winds along mountain ridges.

Gov. Gavin Newsom declared emergencies in six counties to allow state assistance.

The state deployed resources and first responders to several coastal and Southern California counties, and the California National Guard was on standby.

Mohammad Bakri, renowned and controversial Palestinian actor and filmmaker, dies at 72

By MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Mohammad Bakri, a Palestinian director and actor who sought to share the complexities of Palestinian identity and culture through a variety of works in both Arabic and Hebrew, has died, his family announced. He was 72.

Bakri was best known for "Jenin, Jenin," a 2003 documentary he directed about an Israeli military operation in the northern West Bank city the previous year during the second Palestinian intifada, or uprising. The film, focusing on the heavy destruction and heartbreak of its Palestinian residents, was banned by Israel.

Bakri also acted in the 2025 film "All That's Left of You," a drama about a Palestinian family through more than 76 years, alongside his sons, Adam and Saleh Bakri, who are also actors. The film has been shortlisted by the Academy Awards for the best international feature film.

Over the years, he made several films that spanned the spectrum of Palestinian experiences. He also acted in Hebrew, including at Israel's national theater in Tel Aviv, and appeared in a number of famous Israeli films in the 1980s and 1990s. He studied at Tel Aviv University.

Bakri, who was born in northern Israel and held Israeli citizenship, dabbled in both film and theater. His best-known one-man-show from 1986, "The Pessoptimist," based on the writings of Palestinian author Emile Habiby, focused on the intricacies and emotions of someone who has both Israeli and Palestinian identities.

During the 1980s, Bakri played characters in mainstream Israeli films that humanized the Palestinian identity, including "Beyond the Walls," a seminal film about incarcerated Israelis and Palestinians, said Raya Morag, a professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem who specializes in cinema and trauma.

"He broke stereotypes about how Israelis looked at Palestinians, and allowing someone Palestinian to

be regarded as a hero in Israeli society," she said.

"He was a very brave person, and he was brave by standing to his ideals, choosing not to be conformist in any way, and paying the price in both societies," said Morag.

Bakri faced some pushback within Palestinian society for his cooperation with Israelis. After "Jenin, Jenin," he was plagued by almost two decades of court cases in Israel, where the film was seen as unbalanced and inciting.

In 2022, Israel's Supreme Court upheld a ban on the documentary, saying it defamed Israeli soldiers, and ordered Bakri to pay tens of thousands of dollars in damages to an Israeli military officer for defamation.

"Jenin, Jenin" was a turning point in Bakri's career. In Israel, he became a polarizing figure and he never worked with mainstream Israeli cinema again, Morag said. "He was loyal to himself despite all the pressures from inside and outside," she added. "He was a firm voice that did not change during the years."

Local media quoted Bakri's family as saying he died Wednesday after suffering from heart and lung problems. His cousin, Rafic, told the Arabic news site Al-Jarraq that Bakri was a tenacious advocate of the Palestinians who used his works to express support for his people.

"I am certain that Abu Saleh will remain in the memory of Palestinian people everywhere and all people of the free world," he said, using Mohammed Bakri's nickname.

The Kremlin says Moscow made an offer to France regarding a French citizen imprisoned in Russia

By The Associated Press undefined

The Kremlin on Thursday said it was in contact with the French authorities over the fate of a French political scholar serving a three-year sentence in Russia and reportedly facing new charges of espionage.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that Russia has made "an offer to the French" regarding Laurent Vinatier, arrested in Moscow last year and convicted of collecting military information, and that "the ball is now in France's court." He refused to provide details, citing the sensitivity of the matter.

French President Emmanuel Macron is following Vinatier's situation closely, his office said in a statement. French Foreign Ministry spokesperson Pascal Confavreux said Thursday that all government services are fully mobilized to pay provide consular support to Vinatier and push for his liberation as soon as possible.

Peskov's remarks come after journalist Jérôme Garro of the French TF1 TV channel asked President Vladimir Putin during his annual news conference on Dec. 19 whether Vinatier's family could hope for a presidential pardon or his release in a prisoner exchange. Putin said he knew "nothing" about the case, but promised to look into it.

Vinatier was arrested in Moscow in June 2024. Russian authorities accused him of failing to register as a "foreign agent" while collecting information about Russia's "military and military-technical activities" that could be used to the detriment of national security. The charges carry a maximum penalty of five years in prison.

The arrest came as tensions flared between Moscow and Paris following French President Emmanuel Macron's comments about the possibility of deploying French troops in Ukraine.

Vinatier's lawyers asked the court to sentence him to a fine, but the judge in October 2024 handed him a three-year prison term — a sentence described as "extremely severe" by France's Foreign Ministry, which called for the scholar's immediate release.

Detentions on charges of spying and collecting sensitive data have become increasingly frequent in Russia and its heavily politicized legal system since Moscow invaded Ukraine in February 2022.

In addition to criticizing his sentence, the French Foreign Ministry urged the abolition of Russia's laws on foreign agents, which subject those carrying the label to additional government scrutiny and numerous restrictions. Violations can result in criminal prosecution. The ministry said the legislation "contributes to a systematic violation of fundamental freedoms in Russia, like the freedom of association, the freedom of opinion and the freedom of expression."

Vinatier is an adviser for the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, a Switzerland-based nongovernmental

organization, which said in June 2024 that it was doing “everything possible to assist” him.

While asking the judge for clemency ahead of the verdict, Vinatier pointed to his two children and his elderly parents he has to take care of.

The charges against Vinatier relate to a law that requires anyone collecting information on military issues to register with authorities as a foreign agent.

Human rights activists have criticized the law and other recent legislation as part of a Kremlin crackdown on independent media and political activists intended to stifle criticism of the war in Ukraine.

In August 2025, Russian state news agency Tass reported that Vinatier was also charged with espionage, citing court records but giving no details. Those convicted of espionage in Russia face between 10 and 20 years in prison.

Russia in recent years has arrested a number of foreigners — mainly U.S. citizens — on various criminal charges and then released them in prisoner swaps with the United States and other Western nations. The largest exchange since the Cold War took place in August 2024, when Moscow freed journalists Evan Gershkovich and Alsu Kurmasheva, fellow American Paul Whelan, and Russian dissidents in a multinational deal that set two dozen people free.

A Venezuelan family’s Christmas: From the American dream to poverty

By MATIAS DELACROIX and REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

MARACAY, Venezuela (AP) — This was not the Christmas that Mariela Gómez would have imagined a year ago. Or the one that thousands of other Venezuelan immigrants would have thought. But Donald Trump returned to the White House in January and quickly ended their American dream.

So Gómez found herself spending the holiday in northern Venezuela for the first time in eight years. She dressed up, cooked, got her son a scooter and smiled for her in-laws. Hard as she tried, though, she could not ignore the main challenges faced by returning migrants: unemployment and poverty.

“We had a modest dinner, not quite what we’d hoped for, but at least we had food on the table,” Gómez said of the lasagna-like dish she shared with her partner and in-laws instead of the traditional Christmas dish of stuffed corn dough hallacas. “Making hallacas here is a bit expensive, and since we’re unemployed, we couldn’t afford to make them.”

Gómez, her two sons and her partner returned to the city of Maracay on Oct. 27 after crossing the U.S.-Mexico border to Texas, where they were quickly swept up by U.S. Border Patrol amid the Trump administration’s crackdown on immigration. They were deported to Mexico, from where they began the dangerous journey back to Venezuela.

They crossed Central America by bus, but once in Panama, the family could not afford to continue to Colombia via boat in the Caribbean. Instead, they took the cheaper route along the Pacific’s choppy waters, sitting on top of sloshing gasoline tanks in a cargo boat for several hours and then transferring to a fast boat until reaching a jungled area of Colombia. They spent about two weeks there until they were wired money to make it to the border with Venezuela.

Gómez was among the more than 7.7 million Venezuelans who left their home country in the last decade, when its economy came undone as a result of a drop in oil prices, corruption and mismanagement. She lived in Colombia and Peru for years before setting her sights on the U.S. with hopes of building a new life.

Trump’s second term has dashed the hopes of many like Gómez.

As of September, more than 14,000 migrants, mostly from Venezuela, had returned to South America since Trump moved to limit migration to the U.S., according to figures from Colombia, Panama and Costa Rica. In addition, Venezuelans were steadily deported to their home country this year after President Nicolás Maduro, under pressure from the White House, did away with his long-standing policy of not accepting deportees from the U.S.

Immigrants arrived regularly at the airport outside the capital, Caracas, on flights operated by a U.S.

government contractor or Venezuela's state-owned airline. More than 13,000 immigrants returned this year on the chartered flights.

Gómez's return to Venezuela also allowed her to see the now 20-year-old daughter she left behind when she fled the country's complex crisis. They talked and drank beer during the holiday knowing it might be the last time they share a drink for a while — Gómez's daughter will migrate to Brazil next month.

Gómez is hoping to make hallacas for New Year's Eve and is also hoping for a job. But her prayers for next year are mostly for good health.

"I ask God for many things, first and foremost life and health, so we can continue enjoying our family," she said.

Christmas Eve winner in Arkansas lands a \$1.817 billion Powerball lottery jackpot

By OLIVIA DIAZ Associated Press/Report for America

A Powerball ticket purchased at a gas station outside Little Rock, Arkansas, won a \$1.817 billion jackpot in Wednesday's Christmas Eve drawing, ending the lottery game's three-month stretch without a top-prize winner.

The winning numbers were 04, 25, 31, 52 and 59, with the Powerball number being 19. The winning ticket was sold at a Murphy USA in Cabot, lottery officials in Arkansas said Thursday. No one answered the phone Thursday at the location, which was closed for Christmas. The community of roughly 27,000 people is 26 miles (42 kilometers) northeast of Little Rock.

Final ticket sales pushed the jackpot higher than previous expected, making it the second-largest in U.S. history and the largest Powerball prize of 2025, according to www.powerball.com. The jackpot had a lump sum cash payment option of \$834.9 million.

"Congratulations to the newest Powerball jackpot winner! This is truly an extraordinary, life-changing prize," Matt Strawn, Powerball Product Group Chair and Iowa Lottery CEO, was quoted as saying by the website. "We also want to thank all the players who joined in this jackpot streak — every ticket purchased helps support public programs and services across the country."

Lottery officials said they won't know who won until at least Monday because winners must contact a claims center, which is closed for the holidays until then, according to Karen Reynolds, a spokesperson for the Arkansas lottery.

The prize followed 46 consecutive drawings in which no one matched all six numbers.

The last drawing with a jackpot winner was Sept. 6, when players in Missouri and Texas won \$1.787 billion.

Organizers said it is the second time the Powerball jackpot has been won by a ticket sold in Arkansas. It first happened in 2010.

The last time someone won a Powerball jackpot on Christmas Eve was in 2011, Powerball said. The company added that the sweepstakes also has been won on Christmas Day four times, most recently in 2013.

Powerball's odds of 1 in 292.2 million are designed to generate big jackpots, with prizes growing as they roll over when no one wins. Lottery officials note that the odds are far better for the game's many smaller prizes.

"With the prize so high, I just bought one kind of impulsively. Why not?" Indianapolis glass artist Chris Winters said Wednesday.

Tickets cost \$2, and the game is offered in 45 states plus Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Pope Leo XIV urges the faithful on Christmas to shed indifference in the face of suffering

By SILVIA STELLACCI and COLLEEN BARRY The Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Leo XIV during his first Christmas Day message on Thursday urged the faithful to shed indifference in the face of those who have lost everything, such as in Gaza, those who are impoverished, such as in Yemen, and the many migrants who cross the Mediterranean Sea and the American continent for a better future.

The first U.S. pontiff addressed some 26,000 people from the loggia overlooking St. Peter's Square for the traditional papal "Urbi et Orbi" address, Latin for "To the City and to the World," which serves as a summary of the woes facing the world.

While the crowd gathered under a steady downpour during the papal Mass inside St. Peter's Basilica, the rain had subsided by the time Leo took a brief tour of the square in the popemobile, then spoke to the crowd from the loggia.

Leo revived the tradition of offering Christmas greetings in multiple languages abandoned by his predecessor, Pope Francis. He received especially warm cheers when he made his greetings in his native English and Spanish, the language of his adopted country of Peru where he served first as a missionary and then as archbishop.

Someone in the crowd shouted out "Viva il papa!" or "Long live the pope!" before he retreated into the basilica. Leo took off his glasses for a final wave.

Leo surveys the world's distress

During the traditional address, the pope emphasized that everyone could contribute to peace by acting with humility and responsibility.

"If he would truly enter into the suffering of others and stand in solidarity with the weak and the oppressed, then the world would change," the pope said.

Leo called for "justice, peace and stability" in Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Israel and Syria, prayers for "the tormented people of Ukraine," and "peace and consolation" for victims of wars, injustice, political instability, religious persecution and terrorism, citing Sudan, South Sudan, Mali, Burkina Faso and Congo.

The pope also urged dialogue to address "numerous challenges" in Latin America, reconciliation in Myanmar, the restoration of "the ancient friendship between Thailand and Cambodia," and assistance for the suffering of those hit by natural disasters in South Asia and Oceania.

"In becoming man, Jesus took upon himself our fragility, identifying with each one of us: with those who have nothing left and have lost everything, like the inhabitants of Gaza; with those who are prey to hunger and poverty, like the Yemeni people; with those who are fleeing their homeland to seek a future elsewhere, like the many refugees and migrants who cross the Mediterranean or traverse the American continent," the pontiff said.

He also remembered those who have lost their jobs or are seeking work, especially young people, underpaid workers and those in prison.

Peace through dialogue

Earlier, Leo led the Christmas Day Mass from the central altar beneath the balustrade of St. Peter's Basilica, adorned with floral garlands and clusters of red poinsettias. White flowers were set at the feet of a statue of Mary, mother of Jesus, whose birth is celebrated on Christmas Day.

In his homily, Leo underlined that peace can emerge only through dialogue.

"There will be peace when our monologues are interrupted and, enriched by listening, we fall to our knees before the humanity of the other," he said.

He remembered the people of Gaza, "exposed for weeks to rain, wind and cold" and the fragility of "defenseless populations, tried by so many wars," and of "young people forced to take up arms, who on the front lines feel the senselessness of what is asked of them, and the falsehoods that fill the pompous speeches of those who send them to their deaths."

Thousands of people packed the basilica for the pope's first Christmas Day Mass, holding aloft their

smartphones to capture images of the opening procession.

This Christmas season marks the winding down of the Holy Year celebrations, which will close on Jan. 6, the Catholic Epiphany holiday marking the visit of the three wise men to the baby Jesus in Bethlehem.

Turkey detains dozens of IS suspects planning attacks on Christmas and New Year celebrations

ISTANBUL (AP) — Istanbul police launched scores of simultaneous raids on Thursday, detaining over a hundred suspected members of the militant Islamic State group who were allegedly planning attacks against Christmas and New Year's celebrations, authorities said.

A statement from the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office said police were tipped off that the extremist group had called for action — particularly against non-Muslims — during the celebrations.

The office had issued warrants for 137 suspects, of whom 115 were detained. Officers also seized many firearms, cartridges and documents during the raids. It said 124 locations were raided.

The arrests come days after the Trump administration launched widespread military strikes in neighboring Syria to "eliminate" Islamic State fighters and weapons' sites in retaliation for an ambush blamed on the group that killed two U.S. troops and an American civilian interpreter.

Syrian security forces have also launched operations against IS in recent days, including two raids on the outskirts of Damascus, the Syrian capital. In those raids, Syrian officials said Taha al-Zoubi, identified as the IS leader in the Damascus area, was captured and Mohammed Shahadeh, a senior IS commander in Syria, was killed.

Top Turkish officials visited Syria earlier this week to discuss counterterrorism efforts against IS, among other issues.

At its peak in 2015, IS controlled a swath of territory across Iraq and Syria half the size of the United Kingdom. It was notorious for its brutality against religious minorities as well as Muslims who do not follow the militants' extreme interpretation of Islam.

After years of fighting, the U.S.-led coalition broke the group's last hold on territory in late 2019, but IS cells in multiple countries continue to carry out periodic attacks.

Saudi Arabia urges Yemen's separatists to leave 2 governorates as the anti-rebel coalition strains

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Saudi Arabia on Thursday called on Emirati-backed separatists in southern Yemen to withdraw from two governorates they now control, a move that has threatened to spark a confrontation within a fragile coalition that has been battling the Iran-backed Houthi rebels in the country's north.

The statement from Saudi Arabia's Foreign Ministry appeared aimed at putting public pressure on the Southern Transitional Council, a separatist Yemeni force long supported by the United Arab Emirates. Saudi Arabia backs the National Shield Forces of Yemen's internationally backed government in the war against the Houthis.

The separatists' actions have "resulted in an unjustified escalation that harmed the interests of all segments of Yemeni people, as well as the southern cause and the coalition's efforts," the ministry said. "The kingdom stresses the importance of cooperation among all Yemeni factions and components to exercise restraint and avoid any measures that could destabilize security and stability."

Meanwhile, the Houthis buried four of their fighters, including the group's top missile and drone commander who was presumed killed in March, in the first round of U.S. airstrikes to hit the rebels in March.

Ongoing negotiations

The Southern Transitional Council moved earlier this month into Yemen's governorates of Hadramout and Mahra. The Saudi statement said that mediation efforts were underway to have the council's forces

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return to "their previous positions outside of the two governorates and hand over the camps in those areas" to the National Shield Forces.

"These efforts remain in progress," the ministry said.

The local Hadramout governorate's authority said that it supported the Saudi announcement and called for the Emirati-backed separatists to withdraw to positions outside the governorates.

Those aligned with the council have increasingly flown the flag of the flag of South Yemen, which was a separate country from 1967-1990. Demonstrators rallied on Thursday in the southern port city of Aden to support political forces calling for South Yemen to again secede from Yemen.

Following the capture of Yemen's capital, Sanaa, and much of the country's north by the Houthis in 2014, Aden has been the seat of power for the internationally recognized government and forces aligned against the Houthi rebels.

The actions by the separatists have put pressure on the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which maintain close relations and are members of the OPEC oil cartel, but also have competed for influence and international business in recent years.

There has also been an escalation of violence in Sudan, another nation in the Red Sea where the kingdom and the Emirates support opposing forces in an ongoing war.

Further chaos

The Houthis seized Sanaa in September 2014 and forced the internationally recognized government into exile. Iran denies arming the rebels, although Iranian-manufactured weaponry has been found on the battlefield and in sea shipments heading to Yemen despite a U.N. arms embargo.

A Saudi-led coalition armed with U.S. weaponry and intelligence entered the war on the side of Yemen's exiled government in March 2015. Years of inconclusive fighting have pushed the Arab world's poorest nation to the brink of famine.

The war has killed more than 150,000 people, including fighters and civilians, and created one of the globe's worst humanitarian disasters, killing tens of thousands more.

The Houthis have launched attacks on hundreds of ships in the Red Sea corridor over the Israel-Hamas war, greatly disrupting regional shipping.

While traffic has inched up recently in the lull in attacks, many shippers continue to go around Africa through the Cape of Good Hope to avoid the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

Further chaos in Yemen could again draw in the United States.

Washington launched an intense bombing campaign targeting the rebels earlier this year that U.S. President Donald Trump halted just before his trip to the Middle East in October. The Biden administration also conducted strikes against the Houthis, including using B-2 bombers to target what it described as underground bunkers used by the Houthis.

In Sanaa, crowds gathered as uniformed men carried coffins draped in Yemen's flag and topped with flowers during the funerals for the four Houthi fighters.

The dead fighters include Maj. Gen. Zakaria Abdullah Yahya Hajar, whom analysts identified as the group's drone and missile chief. U.S. forces reportedly targeted Hajar, who allegedly received training from the expeditionary Quds Force of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, in a strike in March in Sanaa.

The Houthis provided no information on how or when he died. However, a transcript of a discussion between top American officials on the messaging app Signal later published by The Atlantic magazine included then national security adviser Mike Waltz referencing the initial March 15 attack targeting a Houthi missile commander.

"The first target — their top missile guy — we had positive ID of him walking into his girlfriend's building and it's now collapsed," Waltz wrote at the time.

The Houthis have increasingly threatened Saudi Arabia and taken dozens of workers at U.N. agencies and other aid groups as prisoners, alleging without evidence that they were spies — something fiercely denied by the United Nations and others.

Russian court sentences pro-war activist and Putin critic to 6 years in prison

By The Associated Press undefined

A court in Russia on Thursday convicted a pro-war activist and critic of President Vladimir Putin of justifying terrorism and sentenced him to six years in prison.

Sergei Udaltsov, the leader of the Left Front movement that opposes Putin and is affiliated with the Communist Party, was arrested last year.

According to Russian independent news site Mediazona, the charges against him stem from an article Udaltsov posted online in support of another group of Russian activists accused of forming a terrorist organization. Those activists were convicted earlier this month and handed sentences ranging from 16 to 22 years in prison.

Udaltsov has rejected the charges against him as fabricated. On Thursday, he denounced the verdict as "shameful" and said he was going on a hunger strike, Mediazona reported.

According to the court ruling, the activist will be serving his sentence in a maximum security penal colony.

Udaltsov was a prominent opposition figure during the 2011-12 mass protests in Russia, triggered by reports of widespread rigging of a parliamentary election. In February 2012, he took part in a meeting that then-President Dmitry Medvedev held with various opposition figures.

Russian authorities have ramped up their crackdown on dissent and free speech after the Kremlin sent troops into Ukraine, relentlessly targeting rights groups, independent media, members of civil society organizations, LGBTQ+ activists and some religious groups. Hundreds of people have been jailed and thousands of others have fled the country.

In December 2023, a Moscow court sentenced Udaltsov to 40 hours of compulsory labor for violating procedures relating to organizing a rally after he was detained on Red Square, where he tried to unfurl a flag with the image of Soviet dictator Josef Stalin, according to Russia's state news agency Tass.

Udaltsov was previously imprisoned in 2014 and sentenced to 4½ years on charges related to his role in organizing a 2012 demonstration against Putin that turned turbulent. He was released in 2017.

King Charles III calls for kindness and unity in Christmas message amid global conflicts

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — On a Christmas Day when the war in Ukraine casts a shadow over Europe, concerns over immigration divide societies, and some politicians fan anger and resentment, Britain's King Charles III called on people to focus on kindness instead of conflict.

Delivering his annual holiday address from Westminster Abbey, Charles said Thursday the Christmas story of wise men and shepherds traveling through the night to find their savior shows how we can find strength in the "companionship and kindness of others."

"To this day, in times of uncertainty, these ways of living are treasured by all the great faiths and provide us with deep wells of hope, of resilience in the face of adversity," Charles said. "Peace through forgiveness, simply getting to know our neighbors and by showing respect to one another, creating new friendships."

"In this, with the great diversity of our communities, we can find the strength to ensure that right triumphs over wrong," he added.

The speech, which concluded with a Christmas carol sung by a Ukrainian choir, comes as European leaders rally support for Ukraine amid signs that U.S. President Donald Trump is losing patience with America's traditional European allies. At home, British politics have become increasingly bitter as Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government struggles to control unauthorized migration and bolster creaking public services.

Charles, the titular head of the Church of England, chose Westminster Abbey as the site of his Christmas Day broadcast to underscore the theme of pilgrimage that ran through the speech. The abbey, known as the site of coronations and royal weddings, is also the focus of an annual pilgrimage honoring Edward the

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Confessor, an early king of England who was canonized as a saint in 1161.

"Pilgrimage is a word less used today, but it is of particular significance for our modern world, and especially at Christmas," he said. "This is about journeying forward into the future, while also journeying back to remember the past and learn from its lessons."

Charles and his family made their own pilgrimage on foot earlier in the day to St. Mary Magdalene Church on the king's private Sandringham Estate, about 100 miles north of London.

Charles and Queen Camilla, along with Prince William and his wife, Kate, and their children, Princes George and Louis and Princess Charlotte, and extended family walked to the church and greeted the crowds of people after the service.

Events earlier this year marking the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II underscored the need to learn from the past, Charles said. While there are fewer and fewer living veterans of that conflict, we must remember the courage and sacrifice of those who fought the war and the way communities came together "in the face of such great challenge," he said.

"These are the values which have shaped our country and the Commonwealth," he said. "As we hear of division, both at home and abroad, they are the values of which we must never lose sight."

The monarch's annual holiday message is watched by millions of people in the U.K. and across the Commonwealth, a voluntary association of 56 independent nations, most of which have historic ties to Britain. The pre-recorded speech is broadcast at 3 p.m. London time, when many families are enjoying their traditional Christmas lunch.

The speech is one of the rare occasions when Charles, 77, is able to voice his own views and doesn't seek guidance from the government.

This year's address comes just two weeks after Charles made a deeply personal television appearance in which he said "good news" from his doctors meant that he would be able to reduce his treatment for cancer in the new year.

The king was diagnosed with a still undisclosed form of cancer in early 2024. Buckingham Palace says his treatment is now moving to a "precautionary phase" and his condition will be monitored to ensure his continued recovery.

The speech was accompanied by a video of members of the royal family, from the king to his grandchildren, George and Louis and Charlotte, meeting with the public and carrying out their royal duties.

That included scenes from the king's historic trip to the Vatican as he works to forge closer relations between the Church of England and the Catholic Church.

The event was the first time since King Henry VIII severed ties with Rome that the leaders of the two Christian churches, divided for centuries over issues that now include the ordination of female priests in the Church of England, have prayed together.

The king's message was clear. Even if some years had passed, there's always hope to start over. Peace is possible.

Virtual reality opens doors for older people to build closer connections in real life

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

LOS GATOS, Calif. (AP) — Like many retirement communities, The Terraces serves as a tranquil refuge for a nucleus of older people who no longer can travel to faraway places or engage in bold adventures.

But they can still be thrust back to their days of wanderlust and thrill-seeking whenever caretakers at the community in Los Gatos, California, schedule a date for residents — many of whom are in their 80s and 90s — to take turns donning virtual reality headsets.

Within a matter of minutes, the headsets can transport them to Europe, immerse them in the ocean depths or send them soaring on breathtaking hang-gliding expeditions while they sit by each other. The selection of VR programming was curated by Rendeever, a company that has turned a sometimes isolating

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form of technology into a catalyst for better cognition and social connections in 800 retirement communities in the United States and Canada.

A group of The Terraces residents who participated in a VR session earlier this year found themselves paddling their arms alongside their chairs as they swam with a pod of dolphins while watching one of Rendevers' 3D programs. "We got to go underwater and didn't even have to hold our breath!" exclaimed 81-year-old Ginny Baird following the virtual submersion.

During a session featuring a virtual ride in a hot-air balloon, one resident gasped, "Oh my God!" Another shuddered, "It's hard to watch!"

The Rendevers technology can also be used to virtually take older adults back to the places where they grew up as children. For some, it will be the first time they've seen their hometowns in decades.

A virtual trip to her childhood neighborhood in New York City's Queens borough helped sell Sue Livingstone, 84, on the merits of the VR technology even though she still is able to get out more often than many residents of The Terraces, which is located in Silicon Valley about 55 miles south of San Francisco.

"It isn't just about being able to see it again, it's about all the memories that it brings back," Livingstone said. "There are a few people living here who never really leave their comfort zones. But if you could entice them to come down to try out a headset, they might find that they really enjoy it."

Adrian Marshall, The Terraces' community life director, said that once word about a VR experience spreads from one resident to another, more of the uninitiated typically become curious enough to try it out — even if it means missing out on playing Mexican Train, a dominoes-like board game that's popular in the community.

"It turns into a conversation starter for them. It really does connect people," Marshall said of Rendevers' VR programming. "It helps create a human bridge that makes them realize they share certain similarities and interests. It turns the artificial world into reality."

Rendevers, a privately owned company based in Somerville, Massachusetts, hopes to build upon its senior living platform with a recent grant from the National Institutes of Health that will provide nearly \$4.5 million to study ways to reduce social isolation among seniors living at home and their caregivers.

Some studies have found VR programming presented in a limited viewing format can help older people maintain and improve cognitive functions, burnish memories and foster social connections with their families and fellow residents of care facilities. Experts say the technology may be useful as an addition to and not a replacement for other activities.

"There is always a risk of too much screen time," Katherine "Kate" Dupuis, a neuropsychologist and professor who studies aging issues at Sheridan College in Canada, said. "But if you use it cautiously, with meaning and purpose, it can be very helpful. It can be an opportunity for the elderly to engage with someone and share a sense of wonder."

VR headsets may be an easier way for older people to interact with technology instead of fumbling around with a smartphone or another device that requires navigating buttons or other mechanisms, said Pallabi Bhowmick, a researcher at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign who is examining the use of VR with older adults.

"The stereotypes that older adults aren't willing to try new technology needs to change because they are willing and want to adapt to technologies that are meaningful to them," Bhowmick said. "Besides helping them to relieve stress, be entertained and connect with other people, there is an intergenerational aspect that might help them build their relationships with younger people who find out they use VR and say, 'Grandpa is cool!'"

Rendevers CEO Kyle Rand's interest in helping his own grandmother deal with the emotional and mental challenges of aging pushed him down a path that led him to cofound the company in 2016 after studying neuroengineering at Duke University.

"What really fascinates me about humans is just how much our brain depends on social connection and how much we learn from others," Rand said. "A group of elderly residents who don't really know each other that well can come together, spend 30 minutes in a VR experience together and then find themselves sitting down to have lunch together while continuing a conversation about the experience."

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It's a large enough market that another VR specialist, Dallas-based Mynd Immersive, competes against Rendever with services tailored for senior living communities.

Besides helping create social connections, the VR programming from both Rendever and Mynd has been employed as a possible tool for potentially slowing down the deleterious effects of dementia. That's how another Silicon Valley retirement village, the Forum, sometimes uses the technology.

Bob Rogallo, a Forum resident with dementia that has rendered him speechless, seemed to be enjoying taking a virtual hike through Glacier National Park in Montana as he nodded and smiled while celebrating his 83rd birthday with his wife of 61 years.

Sallie Rogallo, who doesn't have dementia, said the experience brought back fond memories of the couple's visits to the same park during the more than 30 years they spent cruising around the U.S. in their recreational vehicle.

"It made me wish I was 30 years younger so I could do it again," she said of the virtual visit to Glacier. "This lets you get out of the same environment and either go to a new place or visit places where you have been."

In another session at the Forum, 93-year-old Almut Schultz laughed with delight while viewing a virtual classical music performance at the Red Rocks Amphitheatre in Colorado and later seemed to want to play with a puppy frolicking around in her VR headset.

"That was quite a session we had there," Schultz said with a big grin after she took off her headset and returned to reality.

Today in History: December 26 Massive earthquake triggers Asian Tsunami

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, Dec. 26, the 360th day of 2025. There are five days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Dec. 26, 2004, a 9.1-magnitude earthquake beneath the Indian Ocean off the Indonesian island of Sumatra triggered a tsunami with waves up to 100 feet (30 meters) high that killed about 230,000 people across a dozen countries as far as East Africa. The worst-affected countries were Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India and Thailand.

Also on this date:

In 1908, Jack Johnson became the first Black boxer to win the world heavyweight championship as he defeated Canadian Tommy Burns in Sydney, Australia.

In 1941, during World War II, Winston Churchill became the first British prime minister to address a joint meeting of the U.S. Congress, just two weeks after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor that plunged the U.S. into the war.

In 1966, Kwanzaa was first celebrated, a seven-day holiday to help African Americans reconnect with their African heritage.

In 1990, Nancy Cruzan, a young woman in an irreversible vegetative state whose case led to a U.S. Supreme Court decision on the right to die, died at a Missouri hospital.

In 1991, the USSR was formally dissolved through a declaration by the Supreme Soviet.

In 2006, former President Gerald R. Ford died in Rancho Mirage, California, at age 93.

In 2021, South African Nobel Peace Prize winner Desmond Tutu died at 90; the retired archbishop had been an uncompromising foe of apartheid and a modern-day activist for racial justice and LGBTQ rights.

Today's Birthdays: "America's Most Wanted" host John Walsh is 80. Baseball Hall of Fame catcher Carlton Fisk is 78. Baseball Hall of Famer Ozzie Smith is 71. Humorist David Sedaris is 69. Rock musician Lars Ulrich (Metallica) is 62. Actor-musician Jared Leto is 54. Rock singer Chris Daughtry is 46. Actor Beth Behrs is 40. Actor Kit Harington is 39.