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CITY & STATE

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INSIDE

Fire ants spark blaze that kills Bartlett woman

By **Zake McCormack**
American-Statesman Staff

Fire ants are recognized as one of the worst pests in the Central Texas area, but on New Year's Eve, the insects again proved how deadly they can be by sparking a fire that killed a 68-year-old Bartlett woman.

Minnie Gibson died of smoke inhalation during a fire that apparently started as she slept in her mobile home early Wednesday, said Williamson County Justice of the Peace Jimmy Bitt.

South America in the 1960s, have proved deadly to many people and animals through their bites. They also can wreak havoc because of their affinity for electricity researchers said.

ing into electrical circuits," said Anoush Bhaskar, a former research scientist at Texas A&M University.

As more and more ants pass around electrical circuitry, an anti-bug sometimes is formed between positive and negative electrical poles, creating a short circuit.



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Briarcliff mayor rolls up sleeves to aid town

By **Bob Burns**
American-Statesman Staff

When Travis County was unable to respond quickly to a plea for help from the flooded village of Briarcliff, Mayor Mark Hoy did the same as his constituents. He rolled up his sleeves and went to work.



Briarcliff Mayor Mark Hoy pilots a front-end loader to help clear an area near three condominiums at Hunt. Left behind by Lake Travis on Monday. The spores were

Hoy turned a front-end loader and helped several residents clear debris from condominiums that flooded during recent rains that drenched Travis County and much of the state.

Suspect profile narrows yogurt case focus

By **Kerry Haglund**
American-Statesman Staff

Austin police Monday clarified the focus on the people they believe are responsible for killing four teen-age girls Dec. 4 in a North Austin yogurt shop.

the dominant personality, police said. It is doubtful the attacker could make good money here, and quickly. She wanted to buy nice things for the boy, and talked excitedly about the possibilities.

Any physical confrontation may become involved in will only occur when he has the advantage.

Before any confrontation with any adult male, he must have the security of having his friends present.

Modeling business workers struggle for answers in slaying

By **Fannia Ward**
American-Statesman Staff

Brenda Lee Anderson never intended to stay for long. She came to Austin two weeks before Christmas, and before her new arrival, she was gone. But the goodbye was all wrong.

friends said, that brought Anderson to Austin. She had heard she could make good money here, and quickly. She wanted to buy nice things for the boy, and talked excitedly about the possibilities.

Anderson's body was found Saturday in Okin, Minn. She was buried Monday afternoon in the small community where she grew up, in a town that can make no more sense of what happened in Texas than Antietam can.

At the modeling studio where Anderson worked, co-workers are stunned. It's not just the mystery of the murder that troubles them.



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Insurance vote likely to trigger bargain hunting

By **Bruce Hight**
American-Statesman Capitol Staff

The State Board of Insurance Monday to freeze the benchmark rate for private auto insurance at the current rate. But it also will allow for a 20 percent increase in the current rate or 30 percent more.

the lowest possible rates. Until this year, the board set rates that insurers could deviate from only with board permission.

The changes, passed by 3-0 votes, take effect March 1. The result, said Amy Johnson, director of the Office of Public Insurance Counsel, is that consumers will need to shop to make sure they are getting the best possible price for their insurance coverage.

State Farm initially sought a 8.8 percent increase in the benchmark rate, then lowered its request to a 4.8 percent increase with the maximum rate bands of 10 percent above or below the benchmark.

Plans could mean raises for some state employees

By **Debbie Graves**
American-Statesman Capitol Staff

Salaries for dozens of individual state employees could increase by thousands of dollars annually under proposals being studied by top legislative leaders.

State officials did not calculate the total amount of money that would be diverted to raises, but many of the pay hikes would be \$5,000 or less per year. Some, however, would be more than \$10,000 a year.

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