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Austin Daily Herald

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Friday, December 31, 2021

WEEKEND EDITION



**Inside: Hayfield
boys basketball
denies Lyle-Pacelli.**

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Antranette Smith, right, the cousin of Kokou Christopher Fiafonou holds Fiafonou's fiancé Dorothy Gales during a protest of Fiafonou's death last week. Fiafonou was shot and killed by an Austin Police Officer, Zachary Gast. Eric Johnson/photodesk@austindailyherald.com

Protesters seek justice

A week after the death of Kokou Christopher Fiafonou, protesters demand answers

By Eric Johnson
eric.johnson@austindailyherald.com

Around 100 people gathered in Austin Thursday afternoon near the Law Enforcement Center to protest last week's killing of Kokou Christopher Fiafonou by an

Austin police officer.

Fiafonou was shot by Officer Zachary Gast in the parking lot of Kwik Trip on Dec. 23 following a 24-hour standoff that started on the day before.

The protesters were peaceful, but reflected anger and frustration by supporters of Fiafonou's family, who say he was doing nothing wrong when he was shot.

Protesters, who at one point spilled onto the intersection of Main Street and Second Avenue Northeast and blocked traffic for a time, chanted "No Justice, no peace... prosecute the police." The chant at one point was led by Fiafonou's fiancé, Dorothy Gales, who declined to be interviewed.

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Looking Back to 2021

We review some of the top moments of a very unique year



Debris is scatter on the grounds of the CHS, Inc. Fertilizer Plant east of Grant Meadow Thursday, Dec. 16, the result of Dec. 15 storms. Herald file photo

Late storms, gifts define year

By Eric Johnson
eric.johnson@austindailyherald.com

The year 2021 has been a year dominated by a continuing pandemic, breaking news and even some national news that impacted Austin.

Each year is filled with its share of big and encompassing news events, but 2021 in a lot of ways seemed to up the ante.

As we do each year, the Herald looks back at some of the biggest news of this past year, in no particular order.

Storms in December

Early in the week of Dec. 13, everybody knew something strange was develop-

ing. Early forecasts showed a sudden spike in temperatures, far removed from the norm for the month. A high in the upper 50s was projected for that Wednesday.

But as we got closer Dec. 15, forecasts kept upping that to the 60s, while at the same time the National Weather Service began predicting unseasonable storms later that evening.

From a turbulent atmosphere came a line of storms that pounded southeast Minnesota, northeast Iowa and southwest Wisconsin.

The storms, which moved at an astounding 60-70 mph, created an outbreak of record tornadoes and winds that

gusted to as high as 85 mph in places. Power was lost on a countywide scale, including Austin, which lost power to the entire community.

Some places in the county were without power for up to a week and a half after the storms moved through the area.

In Mower County, a total damage assessment was logged at \$542,780. To date, the December storms produced the latest occurring tornadoes ever in Minnesota history, overtaking the original November record by just under a month.

Officer-involved shooting

A standoff that had

stretched for 24 hours ended tragically in the parking lot of an Austin Kwik Trip on Thursday, Dec. 23, in an officer-involved shooting.

In what the Austin Police Department was calling a "mental health crisis," Kokou Christopher Fiafonou, 38 was shot by Austin Police officer Zachary Gast after Fiafonou allegedly confronted police with a knife.

The Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension has taken over the case and is still investigating. They will then send their findings, without recommendation, to the Mower County Attorney's Office.

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The LeRoy-Ostrander Cardinals celebrate their first ever Nine Man Prep Bowl championship over Fertile-Beltrami in US Bank Stadium. Herald file photo

A year of champions

**Hayfield, L-O take home
state titles in 2021**

By Rocky Hulne
sports@austindailyherald.com

The Hayfield boys basketball team captured the first ever state championship in school and program history when they beat Hancock 61-60 in the Class A title game.

The Vikings finished 21-4 overall in a season that required players to wear masks due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hayfield lost to Southland and Grand Meadow early in the regular season, but beat both of those teams on its way to the title.

Ethan Slaathaug, who now plays at Dakota State College in Madison, South Dakota, led Hayfield's charge with 25.3 points, 5.7 rebounds and 4.7 assists per game.

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Chart Your Course

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!
~ 2 Corinthians 5:17 ~

Mayo changes mask requirements

By Alex Guerrero
alex.guerrero@albertaintribune.com

Because of the surge in COVID-19 cases, changes are coming to the way Mayo Clinic operates at all of its campuses.

"Nationwide we're seeing increased transmission with the omicron variant," said Dr. John O'Horo, an internist, critical care and infectious disease specialist at Mayo. "Mayo Clinic has continuously assessed appropriate measures to ensure a safe environment for patients, staff and visitors throughout the pandemic."

Recently, the hospital system reevaluated its mask practices. "Masking, particularly

source masking, has shown a consistent benefit for reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19," he said. "However, we know that masks have different qualities."

So starting this week, the clinic will require visitors, patients and staff wearing bandanas, neck gaiters or masks with exhalation valves to use Mayo Clinic-provided medical or surgical masks.

Because of logistics, the mask policy could vary from site-to-site and could possibly begin later this week or next.

Other visitors and patients will be offered surgical or medical masks as alternatives to

self-provided cloth masks.

"This is a proactive change to reduce the risk of transmission in our campus and ensure a safe environment for our most vulnerable patients," he said.

Staff are already wearing the required masks, with in-patient staff wearing additional personal protective equipment.

O'Horo was quick to compliment the benefits of cloth masks, but said medical masks are verified to meet certain standards for source control and containing transmission.

See **MASKING**, Page 5A