

**What are you thankful for?**

Burt reminds us what today is all about  
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# Daily Herald

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Thursday, November 26, 2009

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## A tragedy without warning

Addison family of 4 found killed minutes after 911 call

BY CHRISTY GUTOWSKI AND MARCO SANTANA  
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An Addison man active in his community opened fire Wednesday on his family before killing himself in a murder-suicide captured on the wife's desperate 911 call authorities said.

A picture-perfect family portrait was shattered when police rushed to the 200 block of South Wisconsin Avenue

See the video at [dailyherald.com](http://dailyherald.com)



Tom Mangiantini

and their two young sons, Angelo and Tommy, about 12 and 8,

respectively — were found dead with spent shell casings near their bodies. A forensic pathologist will perform the four autopsies this Thanksgiving morning.

The couple married Aug. 17, 1991, in LaGrange Park and lived in the Addison subdivision since 1993, public records showed. There were no prior domestic disturbances in which police were called to the home that was adorned Wednesday with Christmas decorations.

The couple did not have a divorce or other legal issues pending in court, but friends and neighbors pointed to financial stress as a potential motive since both had lost their jobs in recent months.

"Every time one of these cases happens you try to figure out why the guy would do it," DuPage State's Attorney Joseph Birkett said. "Sometimes there are signs and indicators but, many times, there's



BEV HORNE/bhorne@dailyherald.com  
Police say they found shell casings beside the bodies of a family of four in a home on South Wisconsin Avenue in Addison.

See **TRAGEDY** on PAGE 11

### Are you ready for Black Friday?

Step 1:

Check your **Twitter** feed

Step 2:

Get your free cup of coffee

Step 3:

Spend \$386 (on average)

BY JAMIE SOTONOFF  
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Costco's been selling Christmas trees since late September, and 24-hour Christmas music has been playing on the radio for weeks.

It's all in anticipation of tomorrow.

The holiday shopping season officially begins, with determined deal-hunters lining up in the pre-dawn darkness in hopes of scoring Doorbusters, Early Bird Specials, Mega Deals and Super BF09 Sales.

Today, on Black Friday Eve, here are a few things to think about while digesting your turkey.

180 million people will shop on Friday: And they'll spend an average of \$386 each, according to blackfriday2009.com.

We're not all crazy: According to sleepbetter.org, 70 percent of Americans do not shop on Black Friday. For those that do, only 12 percent get up before 4 a.m.

If 4 a.m. isn't early enough: Stay up late. Shopping begins at midnight at many suburban stores, including the Chicago Premium Outlet Mall in Aurora and Prime Outlets in

See **FRIDAY** on PAGE 8

When a suburban family discovered the tragic tale of their son's birth mother, they decided to 'adopt' her, too



VINCENT PIERRI/vpierr@dailyherald.com  
From left, Donna Balachowski and Billy, Kerry and Donna Riemer's lives have come together in remarkable ways. Billy Riemer reunited with Balachowski, his birth mom, this summer.

## Thankful for so much

A family's tale of devotion, determination and adoption

BY VINCENT PIERRI  
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It's a story of thanksgiving. A story of reciprocal love. Two mothers of the same son. One mother gives. The other receives and gives back again.

Donna and Kerry Riemer shared their saga this week during Adoption Sunday at Alpine Chapel in Lake Zurich. The church's first adoption awareness event featured testimonies from thankful families.

The Riemers told of their adopted son's reunion with his birth mom and how she was then "adopted" by his family and the Alpine congregation.

The story began more than 30 years ago when Donna and Kerry were high school sweethearts. They had been dating for five years when Kerry was paralyzed in a diving accident in 1980. Their love triumphed over tragedy and the couple married four years later.

Kerry was placed on disability. They lived on Donna's salary as a home health care nurse and settled in Libertyville.



COURTESY OF DONNA RIEMER  
Libertyville High School senior Billy Riemer embraces his birth mother Donna Balachowski when they were reunited this summer.

It was time to start a family, but his disability thwarted the chance for a pregnancy. They decided to adopt, but they hit brick walls on the way.

"The fact that Kerry was in a wheelchair and not working was a huge negative for the adoption agencies," Donna Riemer said.

With the prayers of dozens of friends and after two years of trying, the Riemers finally adopted a 5-month-old girl.

"We named her Faith," Donna Riemer said. "For two years we had faith that God would come through, and now we had Faith in our house."

A few years later, the Riemers adopted a baby boy. Billy joined the family in 1991.

The Riemers agreed early on the children would know they were adopted. "Our kids knew from the moment they could understand," Donna Riemer said. "We felt strongly about that."

The parents also decided if Faith or Billy wanted to find their birth mothers, that was OK, too.

Faith started the search when she turned 18.

"She was living in Peoria. She was only 14 years older than Faith," Donna

See **THANKFUL** on PAGE 8

## Teen's lights draw crowds

Holiday display took 8 hours to program

BY ELISABETH MISTRETTA  
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People may be staring, but no one who knows Zach Gebis is really surprised.

Gebis, 17, hadn't even officially unveiled his holiday light display this week and drivers already were pulling over to watch test runs of the spectacle at 27W537 Timber Lane, near the intersection of North Avenue and County Farm Road near West Chicago.

The one-minute light show, presented many times an evening beginning around dusk, features thousands of lights and is synchronized to holiday music from Gebis' own



Zach Gebis

See the video at [dailyherald.com](http://dailyherald.com)

See **LIGHTS** on PAGE 10

## Economic rebound continues

WASHINGTON — Falling jobless claims. Stronger consumer spending. Higher new-home sales.

These all suggest the country's modest economic rebound is here to stay.

The reports the government issued Wednesday signaled that the final quarter of 2009 got off to a decent start, and are encouraging enough to calm fears of a dreaded "double-dip" recession.

Full story in **Business**.

### Weather

Not fit for turkeys  
High of 40.  
See the back of Business.



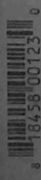
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PHOTOS BY PAUL MICHA/PMICHA@DAILYHERALD.COM  
Seventeen-year-old Zach Gebis' Christmas light display in West Chicago Wednesday.

# Lights: Teen outdoes his Halloween, July 4 displays

Continued from Page 1

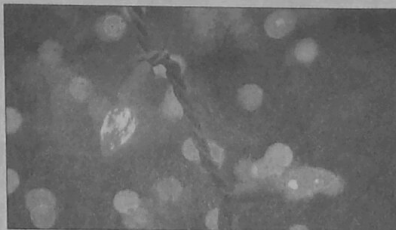
FM station. It's sort of a miniature version of the Ohio light display by Carson Williams, made famous on YouTube and in a Bud Light commercial several years ago.

Gebis, a junior at Community High School in West Chicago who takes classes at Technology Center of DuPage in Addison, spent eight hours on the programming alone. But his classmates and teachers don't expect anything less, he says.

"People see it as, 'That's Zach, the computer guy. He'd rather program than go to the mall or a movie.'" Gebis said Wednesday.

The Christmas light display isn't his first stab at harnessing holiday technology. He also created light shows for the Fourth of July and Halloween this year. But this one, he says, is the biggest and best.

Not only does the display require about a mile's worth



Zach Gebis' Christmas light display has about a mile's worth of extension cords.

of extension cords and boost his parents' electric bill by roughly \$100 a month, but Gebis also launched 101.3-FM and lightsofillinois.com to complement it.

The radio station lets visitors hear the synced-up music in their own cars, and the Web site gives more details about the display, such as when Santa and Mrs. Claus will visit to take pictures with children

on Dec. 12 and 19. Gebis said all the work is worth it for both his family and the community.

"Not only fun for me, fun for my parents and fun for the electric company," he jokes, "but it's fun for the neighbors. Around Christmas, a lot of people are spending money on gifts and parties, so here they can see something great for free."

"People see it as, 'That's Zach, the computer guy. He'd rather program than go to the mall or a movie.'"

Zach Gebis, a junior at Community High School in West Chicago, on the Christmas light display he put up in his family's yard

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