

Panel recommends higher fence around White House

Secret Service problems noted

BY ANITA KUMAR
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(TNS)

WASHINGTON — A panel charged with reviewing the Secret Service following a series of security breaches is recommending significant changes to the fence that surrounds the White House to make it more difficult to climb, including raising it by about 5 feet, adding outward curves on top and eliminating horizontal bars.

More broadly, the panel said Thursday that the Secret Service is “an organization starved for leadership” that needs more agents, better training and discipline and a new leader from outside the agency.

“The problems exposed by recent events go deeper than a new fence can fix,” the panel wrote. “We believe that at this time in the agency’s history, the need for service experience is outweighed by what the service needs today: dynamic leadership that can move the service forward into a new era and drive change in the organization.”

Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson appointed the panel in October fol-



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lowing several dangerous breaches, including a Sept. 19 incident in which a man scaled the fence and ran far into the executive mansion through an unlocked front door. That led to the resignation of Secret Service Director Julia Pierson.

News reports also indicate that a man fired a semiautomatic rifle at the White House while Sasha Obama was home in November 2011, and that President Barack Obama shared an elevator with a security contractor who was carrying a gun during a trip to the Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention earlier this year.

Johnson called the report “astute, thorough and fair” and said that his department and the Secret Service must ensure that all the recommendations are carefully considered.

Much of the report, including details of assessments and recommendations, is classified and will not be released to the public. But the executive summary indicates that the panel found significant problems at the elite agency charged with protecting the president.

Bodies of 8 children found in home

Police say woman with victims taken to hospital with stab wounds

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SYDNEY — Eight dead children and a woman suffering from stab wounds were found inside a home in a northern Australian city on Friday, police said.

Queensland state police said they were called to the home in the Cairns suburb of Manoo-
ra on Friday morning after

receiving a report of a woman with serious injuries.

When police got to the house, they found the bodies of the children inside. The victims range in age from 18 months to 15 years.

A 34-year-old woman found inside the home was suffering from stab wounds to the chest, a Queensland Ambulance Service spokesman said.

The woman was receiving treatment for her wounds and was in stable condition at a hospital, Detective Inspector Bruno Asnicar said. He said

he had no further information, including how the children were killed.

“As it stands at the moment, there’s no need for the public to be concerned about this other than the fact that it’s a tragic, tragic event,” Asnicar said. “The situation is well controlled at the moment. There shouldn’t be any concern for anyone else out of this environment.”

Detectives were speaking with neighbors and police had not determined the relationship between all of the children and the hospitalized woman.

A New Mexico Christmas reading list

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just two chapters. You may recall the start of Chapter 2: “Now it happened that at this time Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be made of the whole inhabited world ...”

But Dickens excepted, I find most other books about Christmas to be kind of sappy. There are, however, some really good books that have Christmas-related scenes. And some are set in New Mexico.

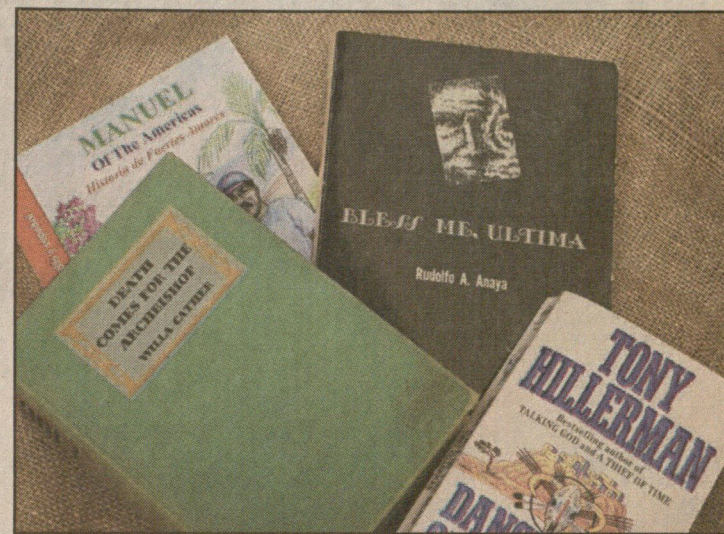
So that’s what I’m recommending to get you in the proper spirit before the holidays.

My favorite Christmas scene in a non-holiday book is in Rudolfo Anaya’s classic, “Bless Me, Ultima.” It’s a minor part of the book and wasn’t even included in the movie — much to my chagrin. Anaya paints a very funny — if slightly sacrilegious — picture of what can happen when a storm drops a heavy blanket of snow the day of the annual Christmas pageant, and only the naughty boys show up and so must play all the roles.

There is a bit of cussing, mostly in Spanish, but if you want a New Mexico book for young kids, also by Anaya, you can always direct them to “The Farolitos of Christmas,” which was illustrated by noted New Mexico artist Edward Gonzales. If you live in New Mexico, you should become exposed to the works of both Anaya and Gonzales. You just should.

Christmas also comes up in two other classics of New Mexico literature: Willa Cather’s “Death Comes for the Archbishop” and John Nichols’ “The Milagro Beanfield War.”

In Cather’s book, Christmas is as bleak as the rest of New Mexico as seen through the eyes of an aristocratic Frenchman assigned to shepherd a rural, forgotten land. Some traditional New Mexico Hispanos now frown upon the book over its outsider Anglo depiction of 19th century life here, just as some people have trouble with the dialect in “Huckleberry Finn.” But “Death Comes for the Archbishop” remains an excellent piece of writing and is well worth reading. It’s No.



DEAN HANSON/JOURNAL

These four books are among several that feature New Mexico-related Christmas scenes that can help the reader rest and relax and cultivate the right holiday mood.

61 on Modern Library’s list of the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century.

In “The Milagro Beanfield War,” Christmas presents a problem for a dying man and his family. And in fairness, it’s the Anglos who are held up to a less-than-flattering light in this humorous take on water, land grants and other issues unique to the Land of Enchantment.

If you want a total change of pace, Santa Fe author David Morrell is best-known for his fictional account of a Vietnam veteran who was given international fame in a movie starring Sylvester Stallone. The book is “First Blood,” and the veteran is named Rambo. But Morrell has written more than a dozen other action-packed books, including “The Spy Who Came for Christmas.”

This thriller is set on Christmas Eve on Santa Fe’s Canyon Road and involves a baby as well as a woman and child who were victims of domestic violence — and, of course, the Russian mafia. Santa Fe is the City Different.

Christine Barber is a New Mexico mystery writer — why does New Mexico produce so many mystery writers? — who uses Christmas as a backdrop for crime.

In her book “When the Devil Doesn’t Show,” detective Gil Montoya investigates a house fire in which three bodies are found, but only one died in the fire. Expect farolitos and lots of other Santa Fe touches.

New Mexico’s favorite mystery writer, the late Tony

Hillerman, didn’t include Christmas in any of his Navajo detective mysteries, but I was reminded by his daughter, Anne, that he did include an interesting winter Zuni Shalako festival scene in “Dancehall of the Dead.”

This harvest celebration occurs each year around Christmastime, though unrelated. Anne Hillerman, by the way, is successfully continuing the stories of her father’s detectives, Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee, in her own series of mysteries.

On the nonfiction side, author and longtime New Mexico journalist David Roybal, who previously wrote a column for the Albuquerque Journal, presents a touching perspective on what its like to be separated from all you love during the holidays in his latest book, “Manuel of the Americas.” The book covers the real life struggles of a Mexican immigrant who sought work in the United States but was eventually able to return home to his family after securing for them a better life.

There. You have plenty of choices. Now there’s no excuse, unless you tend to procrastinate or actually like shopping in crowds. Happy Christmas.

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