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By Katie Curley Katzman Dec 10, 2009

NEWBURYPORT — The distance between Newburyport and Merrimac is just a few miles. But a powerful storm that swept through the region yesterday created two very different scenes in the two

east side of the front and not the west," he said.

As rain poured down on Newburyport yesterday, snow piled up in Merrimac and points west, the latest reminder that this coastal region is highly unpredictable for winter storms.

"The snow/rain line is right over us," Ray Whitley, Triton teacher and National Weather Service weather watcher from Salisbury, said yesterday afternoon.

Whitley, who has been watching and reporting the weather to the NWS for 26 years, said he was originally asked to be a weather watcher because the snow line often sets up over the Newburyport

Merrimac, just west of the front, sustained several inches of snow before it turned to rain and sleet in the afternoon. But in Salisbury, Whitley measured 1.18 inches of precipitation by yesterday afternoon

"The coastal front sets up along the coast, and this time, we got a mix, mainly because we are on the

"We got all our town equipment out there at 6:30 a.m.," Merrimac Department of Public Works director Rick Spinale said of the six town-owned plows. "We started plowing with our regular pieces

and then called in the contractors for five more pieces because the snow was accumulating too

Spinale said that by 10 a.m., the snow had turned to rain, and the town was pretty much cleared of

By yesterday afternoon, no major accidents were reported, but spinouts were widespread, according

to state police. At least two cars spun out on Interstate 495 in Merrimac near Broad Street, a typically dangerous stretch of road during weather events.

"This is a nice little storm to get the guys ready for the winter," Spinale said.

Whitley said. A group of seniors from Newburyport found that out the hard way. Though it was raining in

Mountains. Roseanne Robillard, COA director, said 35 seniors signed up for the tour, which included a

Other towns had it worse. Topsfield received 2 inches of snow, while Middleton received 4 inches,

Newburyport, the weather foiled a bus trip sponsored by city's Council on Aging to the White

"The weather just got worse and worse as they got farther from Newburyport," said Robillard, who said the chartered bus got halfway to its destination before turning back in the near whiteout conditions.

As the storm system moves out to sea, winds will be switching to the northwest, Whitley said. Winds

will pick up, and temperatures will drop, potentially freezing all the wet roads.

"When a low comes through, air lifts and lowers the pressure at the surface," Whitley said. "Nature doesn't like a void, so it is filled with the cold air coming in behind the system. This will be happening

temperatures in November.

The change in weather is a sudden and shocking one to those who enjoyed the unseasonably warm

forecasts look promising.

"Computer models are showing it will be very cold, and we are looking at some snow around the 23rd

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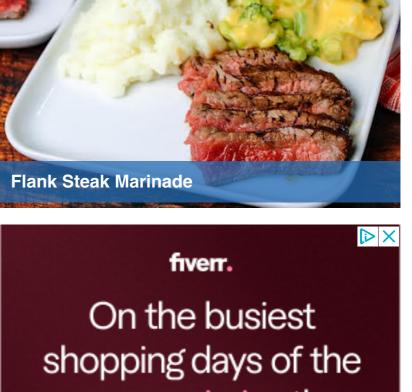
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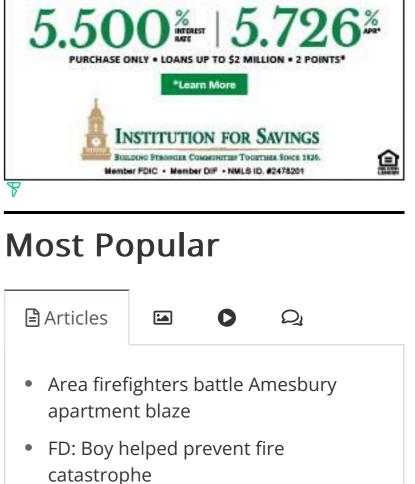
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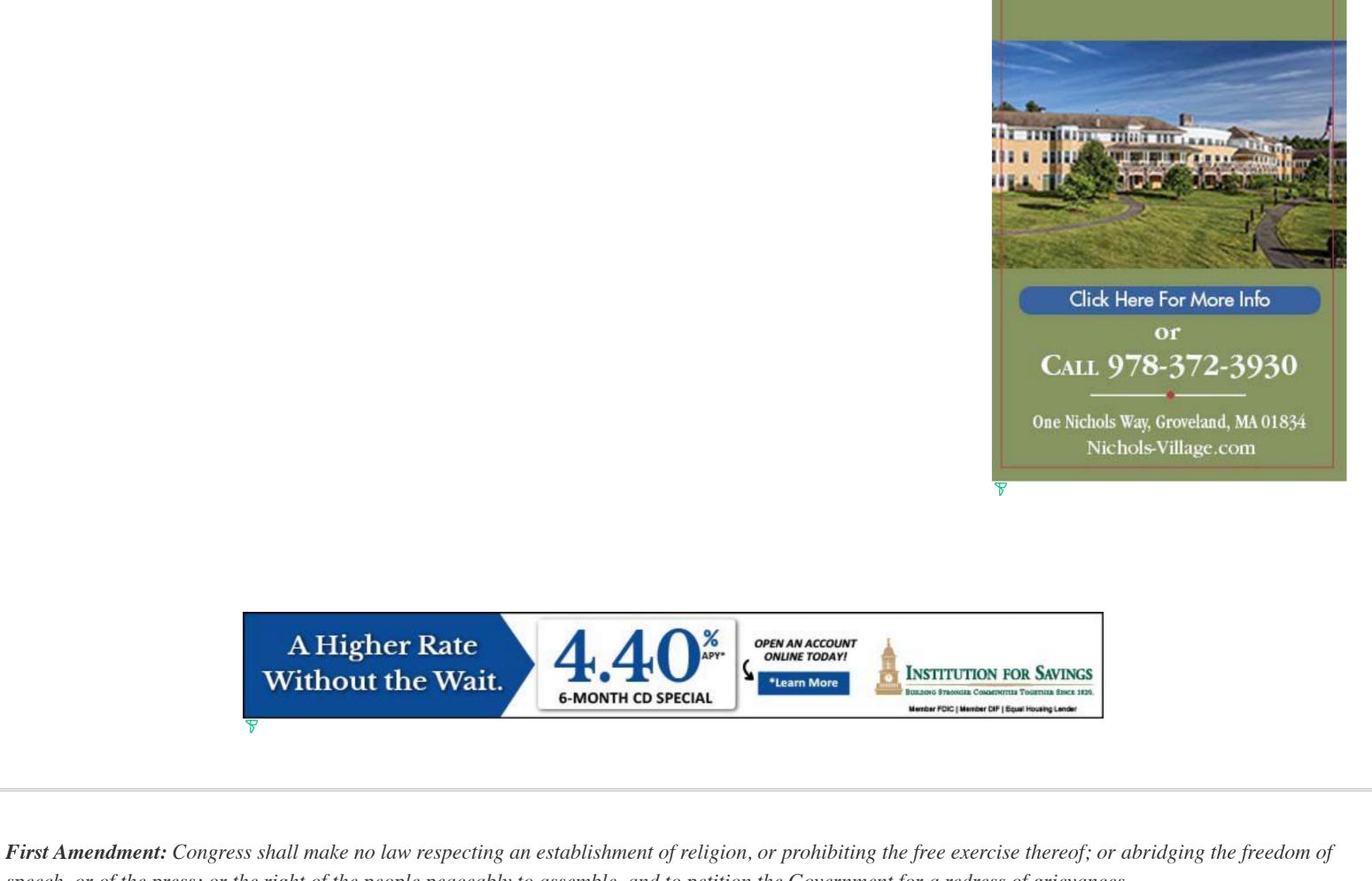
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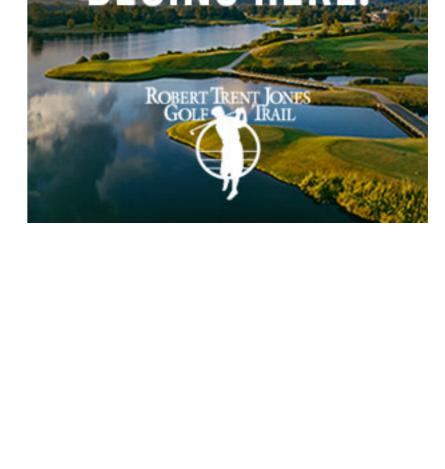
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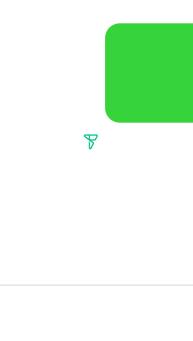
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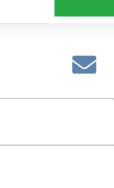
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communities.

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and just a trace of snow. While coastal communities left the plows in the barn, Merrimac officials had extra crews ready to clear the roads.

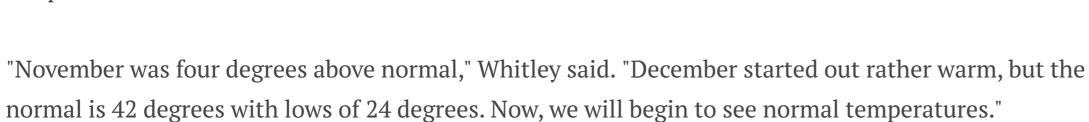
much."

snow.

leisurely lunch and a Christmas show.

in the next few days."

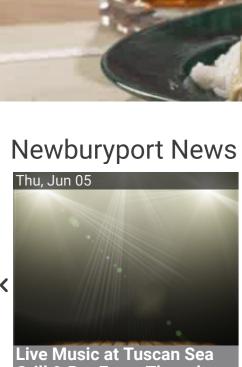




As for the rest of the winter, Whitley said due to the El Niño effect, it could be more rain and cold days than snowy ones. But he's holding out hope for a white Christmas and said that long-term

and 24th."

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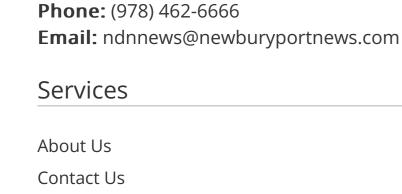












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