

EL CAMPO LEADER-NEWS LIFESTYLE

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A WINTER WONDERLAND

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The Christmas Eve service at Danevang Lutheran Church started at 4 p.m. in 2001 as it has every year for decades. The temperature was cold, but not bitterly so. A light mist fell from the gray sky.

While the faithful sang hymns inside the warm church and listened to the pastor talk about the reason for the season, they had no idea that the temperature was slowly dropping outside, and that the mist was turning to small white flakes. As the service drew to a close, celebrants lighted candles for one another, the church lights were turned off and *Silent Night* was sung.

Afterwards, the pastor went to the front entrance to exchange wishes of "Merry Christmas" with those who had attended as they left for family get-togethers. As each person stepped outside at about 6 p.m., they excitedly exclaimed, "It's snowing!"

It was a light snow at first. But by 6:30 p.m. the flakes were getting bigger and more concentrated, the wind stronger and colder. It was as close to a blizzard as the Texas Gulf Coast has ever experienced — at least in 100 years, by some accounts.

Children and adults alike played in their snow-covered yards during the dark, early hours of Christmas morning. At daybreak everyone from Galveston to Brownsville saw firsthand the Christmas miracle of a record snowfall, and went about creating snowmen — some small, others large. Some plain, others elaborate.

In El Campo the snow measured anywhere from 6 to 10 inches.

People everywhere — pros and amateurs — pulled out their cameras to capture on film proof of a snowfall like none had seen in these parts.

Kathryn Childers, president of

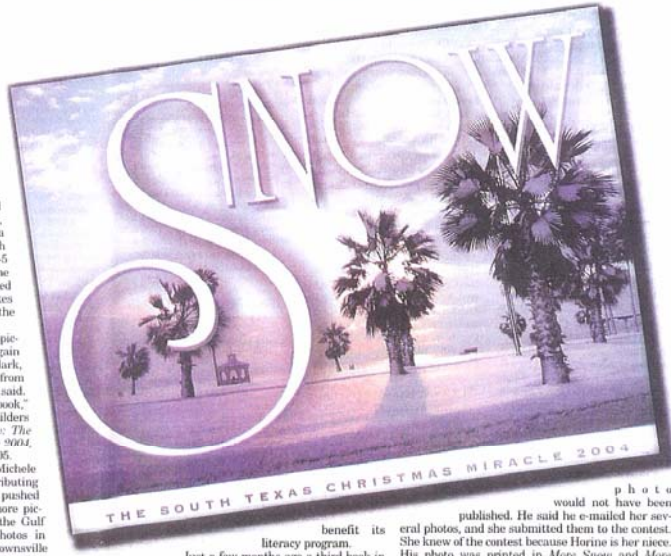
Kathryn Childers Company and RedCab Media in Corpus Christi, said she was on her way to a Christmas Eve midnight church service, and Ocean Drive was 4.5 inches deep in snow. Late to the service, a group of people "huddled together watching the huge flakes fall from the sky and listened to the choir sing Christmas carols."

"I hope someone takes a lot of pictures; this will never happen again in a hundred years," her son Clark, back home in Corpus Christi from Los Angeles for the holidays, said. "Someone ought to publish a book," he added. "Hmmm." Mom Childers thought. And that's how *Snow: The South Texas Christmas Miracle 2004*, came to be published in Oct. 2005.

Childers said Blessing native Michele Horine, who served as a contributing editor to *Snow* and *More Snow*, pushed her to do the *More Snow* so more pictures from the rural areas of the Gulf Coast could be used. Most photos in *Snow* are from the Victoria to Brownsville area, with a few from Galveston, but *More Snow* features several photos from smaller communities, including some in Wharton County such as El Campo, Wharton, Danevang, Louise and Pierce. There are also pictures from Ganado and Edna included.

Snow included 300 images on 162 pages, while *More Snow* features some 320 images on 170 pages.

"We really did the best we could to give the book a feel of the entire area," Childers said after leaving the El Campo H-E-B Thursday where she and Clark signed books. She said they could have had a book "three feet thick" with all the photos that were submitted to the contest endorsed by H-E-B to



benefit its literacy program. Just a few months ago a third book in the series, written by Clark Childers and illustrated in clay by artist William Wilhelm, was published. Childers combined his rhythmic, rhyming verse with submitted photos and scanned pictures of Wilhelm's clay artwork illustrations, to create *More Snow For Kids*, the only contemporary children's book of its kind.

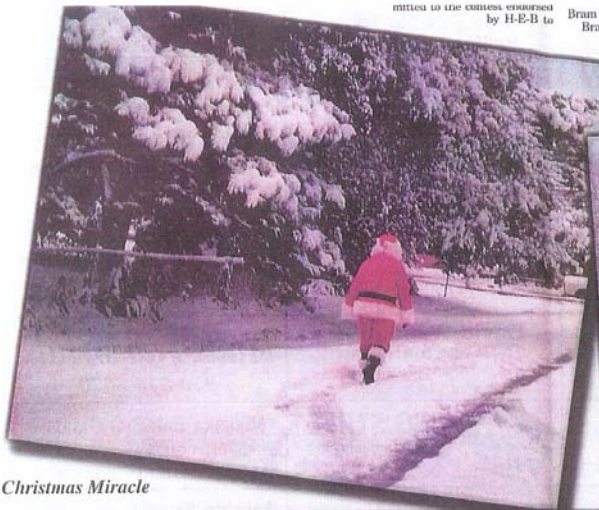
It is not known how many El Campo area photographers submitted pictures for consideration, but several made it into print. Published were photos by Leon Macha, Barbara Reed, Marie Powell, Clayton Brandes, Keith Bram, Garland Blaha, Virginia Popp and Margaret Johnson. All were published in *More Snow*, and one photo each from Macha and Bram were printed in *More Snow for Kids*.

photo published. He said he e-mailed her several photos, and she submitted them to the contest. She knew of the contest because Horine is her niece. His photo was printed in *More Snow* and *More Snow for Kids*.

He said getting published in the popular books is "neat." In fact, it inspired him to buy a new digital camera. "I told Cherie (his wife) I'm a published photographer now, so I've got to have better equipment," he laughed.

Macha said he was riding around with his family on a side street off of West Norris when he saw Santa walking down the road. "When we first drove by Santa was walking toward us. When I got turned around he was walking away from us. I just got lucky," he said.

Childers used the Santa photo to end the pictorial journey through *More Snow*, and it was near the back of the children's book.



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Bram were printed in *More Snow for Kids*. Bram's photo captured a snow-covered Danevang Lutheran Church on Christmas morning on his way to take pictures of his farm.

Bram said had it not been for Sarah Sless, office manager of the Danevang Farmers Co-op, his

the back of the children's book.

"The big thing about the book for El Campo is that Santa's last stop was in El Campo," Kathryn Childers chuckled in reference to Macha's photo. Merry Christmas, y'all!



Christmas Miracle

Snow, The South Texas Christmas Miracle 2004, pictured above, is the first of a three-book series. The second and third books included local and area photos.

Some of the published pictures are (clockwise from top left):

- Leon Macha caught Santa apparently walking back to his sleigh on a street off of West Norris Christmas morning.
- Clayton Brandes saw this snow-covered barn would make a nice picture.
- Barbara Reed shot a traditional family photo.
- Keith Bram of Danevang found the Danevang Lutheran Church sitting in a field of undisturbed white snow to be a worthy photo subject.

