

U.S. retail sales down 0.4 pct. in January

WASHINGTON (AP) — Cold weather across much of the nation contributed to a drop in retail sales in January. Americans spent less on autos and clothes and at restaurants — a decline that suggests that momentum from consumer spending at the end of 2013 has tailed off. The Commerce Department said Thursday that retail sales fell a seasonally adjusted 0.4 percent last month. That marked the second straight decline after a 0.1 percent drop in December.

Freezing cold and heavy snowfall raked much of the United States, cutting into store traffic and

weighing on post-holiday sales. Major store chains have reduced their profit outlooks, including Wal-Mart Stores Inc., the largest retailer.

“Horrible all round,” said Ian Shepherdson, chief economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics.

The tepid showing contributed to a lower opening on Wall Street.

The Dow Jones industrial average shed more than 80 points in early trading before paring its losses.

Prospects for economic growth could remain lackluster for February, too, after snowstorms

blanketed almost a third of the nation Thursday. The storm overlaps this week with a government survey that’s being used to calculate the February jobs report.

“It’s quite possible that we have to brace ourselves for another soft jobs report,” said Jennifer Lee, senior economist at BMO Capital Markets. “That’s due to the snow.”

Economic slowdowns caused by winter weather usually lead to stronger growth once temperatures rise again. But the repeated battering of snowstorms this winter means that waiters, limousine drivers and other hourly workers

might never recoup their lost wages later this year, said Diane Swonk, chief economist at Mesirow Financial.

“You disrupted incomes for some people permanently,” Swonk said.

She estimates that economic growth during the first three months of this year will be “well below” a 2 percent annual rate — a steep drop-off from the 3.2 percent rate in the final quarter of 2013.

The retail sales report is the first look at last month’s consumer spending, which accounts for about 70 percent of all economic activity.

Underground gas line blast leaves 2 hurt

KNIFLEY, Ky. (AP) — An underground transmission pipeline carrying natural gas exploded early Thursday in southern Kentucky, sending two people to the hospital, destroying two homes and alarming residents who saw flames from miles away.

The explosion happened about 2 miles in a hillside about 100 feet off the road and left a crater 60 feet wide, said Clark County Emergency Management Director Greg Thomas said. People said they “saw the fire in the sky,” Thomas said.

Both of the injured people were treated and released, Kentucky Emergency Management spokesman Jimmy Rogers said. The two were in the same home when they were hurt, though only one suffered burns, Thomas said. A third home was damaged along with four or five vehicles.

About 20 homes within a few miles of the blast site were evacuated, Thomas said. The flames were extinguished by late morning, and residents would be allowed back into their homes in the afternoon, he said. The explosion occurred in the community of Knifley, about 100 miles south of Louisville near the Green River Lake Wildlife Management area.

The 30-inch pipeline, which was about 20 feet underground, is owned by Columbia Gulf Transmission.

The company said in a news release that gas flow to the damaged pipeline was stopped and trained workers have been sent to work with emergency responders to secure the area.

“We don’t yet know the cause but we’re working with the appropriate agencies to conduct a thorough and complete investigation,” the release said.

The company’s operators detected a drop in pressure in the pipeline, known as Line 200, at 2:05 a.m., the company said.

Anchorman’s hobby is officiating

by BOB KING

In his weekday job, he’s in front of the camera. When he’s pursuing his hobby on weekends, he’s out in front of the crowd.

Colin Murphy of Hastings is the anchor on the 6 and 10 p.m. newscasts at KHAS-TV in Hastings. On Saturday nights, he’s an official refereeing high school basketball games across Nebraska. He helped officiate the Holdrege-Cozad basketball boys’ and girls’ games at Holdrege High School Jan. 25 where some of the fans thought he looked familiar.

The KHAS-TV anchorman has lived five or six years in Nebraska. Before becoming the Hastings NBC station’s anchorman, he spent three years in the sports department.

Officiating games is right down his alley because he was a starting point guard for three years on his high school basketball team in Philadelphia. He played all four years in college at Misericordia University in Dallas, Pa., located in northeast Pennsylvania. He was on the junior varsity his first two years and on the varsity his last two years at Misericordia University.

One claim to fame for the 6’ tall former college

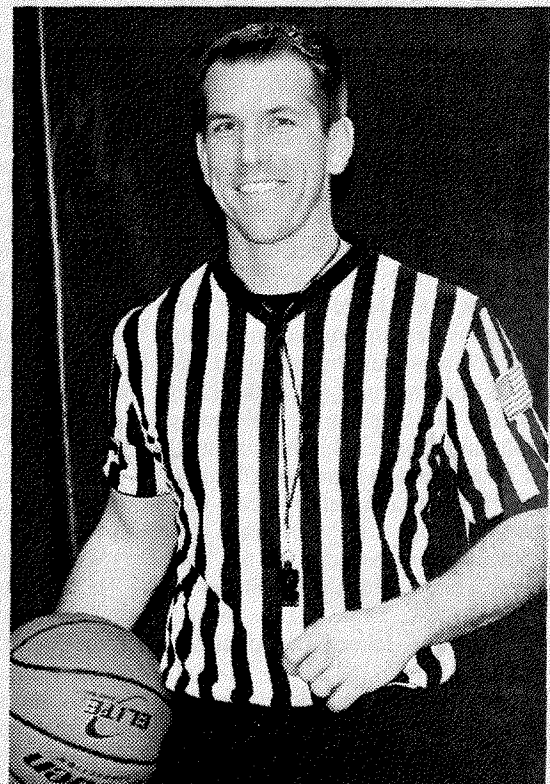
point guard is that he roomed with a four-time All-American player, Willie Chandler. His fellow Misericordia basketball player led the country in scoring in Division 3. He averaged about 30 points a game for more than a year.

Asked why he referees basketball games, the 31-year-old Murphy said, “I’ve been doing it ever since I got out of college. It keeps me out of trouble and in shape. Mostly, I do all Saturdays. I take what I can. I enjoy it. I like to stay close to the game any way possible. I’m too old to play. I might as well referee.”

He explained while waiting for the second half of the Holdrege-Cozad boys’ game to begin, “It (officiating) keeps me on the move. I get to see all the players and coaches. I like that. It gets me out in the community. I like that.”

That’s probably another benefit—keeping one of the faces of KHAS-TV out among viewers in south central Nebraska, including the Holdrege area which it serves.

Here’s what he likes about doing newscasts Monday-Friday for Channel 5: “Just the interaction with the people. Something new and different every day. Never an ordinary day.”



TV ANCHORMAN—Colin Murphy is the anchorman of the 6 and 10 p.m. newscasts on Channel 5, KHAS-TV in Hastings. His hobby is refereeing high school basketball games, something he has done since he was in college. He played high school and college basketball in Pennsylvania.



OFFICIATING IN HOLDREGE—Colin Murphy of Hastings is shown running down court at Holdrege High School on Jan. 25. He was keeping up with the girls playing in the Holdrege High-Cozad High basketball game. The KHAS-TV broadcaster says he likes officiating partly because it keeps him in shape. Mr. Murphy officiates only on Saturdays as he is busy doing newscasts Monday-Friday.

The 31-year-old Pennsylvanian worked one to two years at an ABC station in Virginia, doing general news, before he moved to Hastings.

On Jan. 18, he helped referee the Adams Central-Doniphan basketball games.

There’s another reason he enjoys officiating basketball games. He says it’s this, “The guys I work with. I get to hang around with them.” On that January Saturday at the Holdrege High gym, he worked with fellow officials Jayson Cafferty and Jeff Schneider, both of Hastings. This Saturday, he’ll help referee at the St. Paul-Holdrege High basketball games in St. Paul. It will be the third time he’s officiated at a Holdrege basketball game this season.

On Jan. 25, Official Murphy helped referee a close Holdrege-Cozad boys’ game that turned into bedlam when Holdrege’s Jackson Berney hit a “3” at the end of regulation. Then as Holdrege High School became a pressure cooker in overtime, there was the young official right in the thick of it, helping call fouls and turnovers in the 64-62 nail-biter that Cozad won.

One thing you can count on: Whether it’s behind the camera telling the latest big news or officiating and running down the basketball court, Mr. Murphy is in the midst of all the action.

a little bit ...
most anything

This message was on the sign at the Kearney Church of Christ. Never give up. Remember—was once a basket case.