

A4 CENTRAL ILLINOIS

Decatur, Ill. • Monday, November 29, 1999

OH CHRISTMAS TREE



John and Kim Schwalbach of Decatur brought their family, Sophie, 2; Kat, 7, in the hat; and Tori, 12, to the 4E's Christmas Tree Farm near Mount Zion on Sunday to look for the perfect tree — and they found it.

EXPULSION: Overall review of disciplinary code coming in spring

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will examine expulsion policies in the spring as part of an overall review of the student disciplinary code. He said the review will answer questions such as: Are minorities being unfairly disciplined?

Superintendents in Springfield, Bloomington, Peoria and Champaign did not return calls. The school districts in Normal and Urbana did not expel any students in the 1997-98 school year. The Bloomington School District expelled two students that year. Both were white.

A group of black legislators recently held a news conference at the Capitol to criticize schools' treatment of black students, arguing that black students are punished more severely than others.

"If the blacks are only getting the maximum punishment and the others, who just may be of another ethnic group, get a lesser punishment, then that becomes arbitrary," said state Sen. Donnie E. Trotter, D-Chicago. Trotter is one of the people running against U.S. Rep. Bobby L. Rush, D-Chicago. Rush's congressional district on Chicago's South Side is primarily black.

State Rep. Constance A. "Connie" Howard, D-Chicago, has a theory about why black students are expelled in Decatur at a greater rate than white students. "I'm sure that a lot of this is due to a lack of sensitivity by school administrators and school

boards," Howard said. While rejecting the race argument, Arndt said: "We're all willing to learn how to do our job better."

Arndt also continues to spurn outside attempts to influence Decatur schools. He said "people who live and work in the community

"There's been a lot of energy spent to make sure that our schools are safe. We have to look at our system and ask, 'Are we dealing with all of our students fairly?'"

Superintendent David Markwood, Rock Island School District

nity" will review disciplinary codes and there will be "no state representation." Craig Whitlock is superintendent of United Township High School in the Quad Cities. He also previously served as president of the Illinois Association of School Administrators. His school district did not expel any students during the 1997-98 school year.

He said the outside criticism of Decatur schools does not carry

much credibility with him and cautioned against reading too much into statistics. Whitlock said most schools expel so few students that a couple of students of any race getting expelled can dramatically shift percentages.

"They'll show your stats," Whitlock said.

In the Rock Island School District, Superintendent David Markwood admitted the district has a history of disproportionately expelling black students. In the 1997-98 school year, the year before Markwood became superintendent, the Rock Island School District expelled 12 students. Nine were black.

Black students accounted for 32 percent of the district's enrollment that year, but 75 percent of the expulsions.

"Unfortunately, statistics don't show us the causes. Many of us throughout the state have looked at those things to look for causes," Markwood said. He said statistics also show that minority students are underrepresented in fine arts classes and upper level academic programs. "That's a concern and should be a concern," Markwood said. "One of the things I like about our district is we're not going to run away from problems."

"There's been a lot of energy spent to make sure that our schools are safe. We have to look at our system and ask, 'Are we dealing with all of our students fairly?'"

Yes! It's so satisfying.

Tony Reid roams Central Illinois on Mondays for the Herald & Review.

Herald & Review

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Y2K: 2000 will be busy wedding year

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communities around the nation and the world. Thousands of couples from Philadelphia to Thailand are choosing to say their "I do's" in chorus on New Year's Eve as part of their city's celebrations to mark the new year.

Philadelphia Mayor Edward G. Rendell and his wife, U.S. Circuit Court Judge Marjorie Rendell, will officiate a ceremony at the Grand Hall of the Pennsylvania Convention Center for 999 couples.

In Wilmington, Del., at least 75 couples have paid \$30 to get married and receive a commemorative "Millennium Marriage Certificate" in a ceremony at a riverfront park.

And in Thailand, the allure of a group wedding can be attributed to economics. With the country still trying to recover from the 1997 Asian economic crisis, the Wedding Business Consultant Co. is pitching the ceremony with 2,000 couples as a cost-effective way to tie the knot. For \$275 per couple, organizers will arrange the ceremony. Couples must provide their own refreshments and pay for a honeymoon room.

Scott Sears and Zelda Neeley of Decatur are planning to tie the knot on Jan. 1 and begin their wedded life with the new year. But they said picking the date had nothing to do with the hype about the year 2000.

"My sister, Belinda, and my aunt, Joyce Sadorus, were pressing us for a date," Sears said. "We said April, or sometime in the spring. But they wanted us to do it sooner so we started talking about Jan. 1."

Sears, 37, and Neeley, 35, were a couple more than 20 years ago while both were pupils at Roosevelt Middle School. Then Neeley's parents moved the family to California and the two lost contact.

Eventually, Neeley returned to Decatur but did not run into Sears again until June 1.

"Scott came over to see my brother but he was asleep," Neeley said. That was about 7 p.m. and they sat on her front porch talking until 4 a.m., she said.

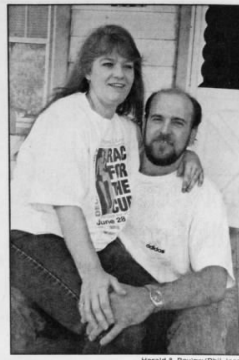
Of their decision to marry, "even our friends were surprised," said Sears.

New Year's Eve will be the wedding day for Regina Sweck, 27, and Richard Opalka, 26, of Decatur, who got engaged on Valentine's Day in 1998.

"I said pick a date. He went to the calendar and decided we'd start off the new year right," Sweck said.

Opalka, who met his future bride when they worked at Starship Billiards Parlor, harks back to their engagement for the wedding date. They had known each other six months when he popped the question.

"When I first proposed to her, she said, 'Now we have to date so we get to know each other,'" Opalka said. "She said then that we shouldn't get married before New Year's Eve 2000. I've known for the last year that I really wanted to marry her."



NEW YEAR'S NUPTIALS: Scott Sears and Zelda Neeley of Decatur plan to be married on Jan. 1. The couple says the date had nothing to do with their decision on when to tie the knot.

"I didn't think too much about the date at first. But now it seems kind of cool."

While a few area couples are marrying Dec. 31 or Jan. 1, the outlook for weddings during 2000 is exceptionally strong, based on hall rentals for receptions.

Kevin Hinton, general manager of Oak Terrace Country Club south of Pana, said as of Nov. 15 he had only one weekend open between March and September next year because of wedding receptions. "Our normal wedding business has doubled for 2000," he said.

Mary Knackmush, facility manager for the Decatur-Macon County Fair, said the Pride of the Prairie Center on the fairground is nearly booked solid June through September.

"There's not a Saturday left," Knackmush said. "I've started having inquiries about Fridays. The number of weddings will be way up next year."

Knackmush said she had inquiries about renting the center for New Year's Eve weddings but already had it reserved for a large private party.

BRIEF

H&R staff report

Taylorville man released after accident

MORRISONVILLE — A Taylorville man escaped serious injury in a Saturday accident that claimed the life of his wife.

Marion J. Courtney, 75, was driving a pickup truck when it collided with a deer on Illinois 48 near Morrisonville.

Illinois State Police in Springfield said the accident happened around 5 p.m. A police report said the force of the impact sent the deer's body flying through the windshield of the Ford Ranger pickup, striking Courtney and his wife, 63-year-old Lillian M. Courtney.

Both were taken to St. Vincent Memorial Hospital in Taylorville after the accident where she was pronounced dead. Marion Courtney was treated and later discharged.

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POSTCARDS: Dickerson counts his blessings

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The objective now is to wait until the colors look real good and then quench the piece in a bucket of water — freezing the chemical reaction and making the colors stick."

The artist's repertoire also includes ceremonial-type masks and other purely ornamental art, often shaped like animals and decorated with wild turkey feathers and beads. Again, there is a American Indian/ancient culture feel to it, but it's all inspired by Dickerson's own abundant muse. "Whatever you call his work, it really says something to me," says Fabian Tasson, a Springfield-based forensic scientist and psychotherapist who finds the Noble artist's creative experiments fascinating. He first bumped into Dickerson at a Springfield art fair 10 years ago and has bought at least a piece a

year from him ever since. "I've got several masks. I have a shield. I have a bear. I've got a salamander and just a whole variety of fabulous pieces of work that he has done," said Tasson, 58. "I look forward every year to seeing what he has come up with this time."

Customer feedback like that is enough to fire up the enthusiasm of any artist, and Dickerson has a whole gallery of similarly delighted clients. He realizes he is one lucky guy and never stops counting his blessings: "I know how fortunate I am to be able to do what I do," he says.

"And, inside, I still get that excited feeling when I produce a really good piece," he pauses, smiling, staring off into space, his mind's eye filled with past images of fiery triumph. "I'll look at that beautiful pot I've just made and go 'Yeah!'

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Here is the week's schedule of government meetings and other activities of interest to the public in Decatur and Macon County.

Tuesday

Macon County Board Finance Committee, 3 p.m., Macon County Office Building, 141 S. Main St., Decatur.
Macon County Board Personnel Committee, 4 p.m., Macon County Office Building, 141 S. Main St., Decatur.
Macon County Board Elderly Committee, 6:15 p.m., Macon County Office Building, 141 S. Main St., Decatur.
Decatur City Council, 6:30 p.m., Council Chambers, Third Floor, Decatur Civic Center, 1 Gary K. Anderson Plaza, Decatur.
Whitesboro Township Board, 7 p.m., Town Hall, Orens.

Wednesday

Decatur Electrical Commission, 4 p.m., community development depart-

ment conference room, Decatur Civic Center, 1 Gary K. Anderson Plaza, Decatur.

Macon County Emergency Telephone System Board, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., E 15B Office, 363 S. Main St., Suite 345, Decatur.
Macon County Board Transportation Committee Meeting, 4:30 p.m., Macon County Highway Department, 2405 N. Westfield St., Decatur.
Macon County Mental Health Board, 7 p.m., Mission Court Building, 132 S. Water St., Suite 347, Decatur.

Thursday

Decatur City Plan Commission, 3 p.m., city council chambers, third floor, Decatur Civic Center, 1 Gary K. Anderson Plaza, Decatur.
Macon County Board, 4:30 p.m., Village Plaza, Decatur.
Macon County Board, 4:30 p.m., Village Plaza, 207 E. Lockhart St., Natick.

Friday

Macon County Board Justice Committee, 9 a.m., Macon County Office Building, 141 S. Main St., Decatur.

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