

A4 CENTRAL ILLINOIS Decatur, Illinois • 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. "We're reviewing to 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 Uriah also did not return calls. Students in the 1997-98 school year: The Bloomington School District expelled two students that year. Both were black.

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

"The schools are only getting the maximum punishment and the others, who just may be of another ethnic group, get a lesser punishment," said state Sen. Donne E. Trotter, D-Chicago. Trotter is one of the two most prominent U.S. Rep. Bobby Rush, D-Chicago. Rush's congressional district is Chicago's South Side is primarily black.

State Rep. Constance A. "Connie" Howard, D-Chicago, has an theory about why black students are expelled more. Decatur's expulsion rate is greater than that of 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 spur 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

much credibility with him and cautioned against reading too much into the statistics. He said most schools expect to see students that a couple of students of a group receive expulsions. "That's how you stats," Whitlock said.

In the Rock Island School District, Superintendent David Markwood has distinguished the district by its disproportionately expelling black students. In the 1997-98 school year, the year before Arndt became superintendent, the Rock Island School District expelled 12 students. Nine were black.

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

"We're definitely statistics that don't show us the causes. Many of us throughout the state have looked at those things to look for causes," Markwood said. He also previously served as president of the Illinois Association of School Administrators. His school district did not exceed any students during the 1997-98 school year.

He said the outside criticism of Decatur schools does not carry

weight.

"I think it'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?'"

## POSTCARDS: Dickerson counts his blessings

Continued from A1

The display is a real treat, 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.

St. Patrick's artwork also

includes ceremonial-type masks

and other purely ornamental art,

often shaped like animals,

decorated with wild turkey feathers and beads. Again, there is a American Indian influence clearly felt here, but it's all adorned by Dickerson's own abundant muse.

"Whatever you call his work, it has a certain quality to it," says Fabian Tassan, a Springfield-based forensic scientist and psychotherapist who finds the Noblesville artist's performances fascinating. He first bumped into Dickerson at a Springfield 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 does," Tassan said. "He looks forward every year to seeing what he has come up with this time."

Cummer feedback like that is enough to fire up the enthusiasm of any artist, and Dickerson has a whole gallery of similarly delighted customers. "He's a very lucky guy and never stops counting his blessings: 'I know how fortunate I am to be able to do what I do,'" Cummer said.

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

## PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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

## Today

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 of Education, 4 p.m., Macon County Office Building, 141 S. Main St., Decatur.

Decatur City Council, 6:30 p.m., council chambers, 1st floor, Anderson Civic Center, 1 Gary K. Anderson Plaza, Decatur.

Whitmore Township Board, 7 p.m., Town Hall, Oreana.

## Wednesday

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

## Y2K: 2000 will be busy wedding year

Continued from A1

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 millennium.

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

In Wilmington, Del., at least 75 couples have paid \$30 to get married and receive a commemorative "2000 Wedding Certificate" in a ceremony at a riverfront park.

And in Thailand, the allure of a group wedding can attract tourists and couples who have been 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 handle the ceremony. Couples can provide their own refreshments and pay for a honeymoon moon.

Scott Sears and Zeilda Neely of Decatur are planning to tie the knot on Jan. 1 and begin their wedding life with the new year. But they said picking the date had nothing to do with the hype around 2000.

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

Sears, 37, and Neely, 35, were a couple more than 20 years ago. They both grew up at Hoopeston Middle School. Then Neely's parents moved the family to California and the two lost contact.

Eventually, Neely returned to Decatur but did not return into Sears again until June 1.

"Scott came over to see my brother but he was asleep," Neely 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 Regis Sweek, 27, and Richard Opala, 36, 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," Sweek said.

Opala, who met his future bride when they were at Starship Billiards Parlor, had to tie them off to the calendar for the wedding date. They had known each other six months when he popped the question.

"She said, 'I'm not going to run away from problems,'" Sweek said.

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H&amp;R staff report

Taylorville man released after accident

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

Mariion J. Courtney, 52, was driving

vying a pickup truck when it collided with a deer on Illinois 48 near Marion.

Illinois State Police in Springfield said the accident happened around 5 p.m. A police report said the force of the impact threw the deer's body flying through the windshield of the Ford Ranger pickup, striking

Courtney and his wife, 83-year-old Lillian M. Courtney.

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

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