



SUNDAY NEWS-DEMOCRAT

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RUNNING DOWN A



DREAM

Triad High School cross country runner Jeff Schirmer is running toward a scholarship. He's running after a rival. He's trying to outrun a tough childhood. And he's winning.



RAUL VASQUEZ/News-Democrat

Triad High School's Jeff Schirmer runs toward the finish line of the Mississippi Valley Conference Cross Country Meet on Oct. 13 in Waterloo. Schirmer came in first in the race, one in a series of successes this cross country season.

By BRIAN BRUEGGEMANN
News-Democrat

Jeff Schirmer has plenty to run from. He spent part of his childhood homeless. He doesn't know his father. His mother is not allowed to raise him. There isn't much in his background to show he

might be headed anywhere good.

But in his sophomore year, the quiet kid with the messy brown hair made a stir in gym class. Jeff ran the mile in 5 minutes and 12 seconds, leaving the school's track runners behind.

Now the 18-year-old is running toward something.

Please see DREAM, A8

Plans, funds for aviation park vanish

Little to show for \$1 million

By MIKE FITZGERALD
News-Democrat

CAHOKIA — The nonprofit Parx Foundation spent \$1 million in cash and in-kind donations — including \$400,000 in state grants — trying to convert the vacant Parks College campus into an aviation theme park.

The park was to include an aviation museum and feature hot air balloon rides, a replica World War I-era French village and mock aerial dog-fights.

But the foundation hit a wall when it failed to convince St. Louis University to sell the 114-acre site at a price it could afford. In January 2004, five years after its formation, the group's board voted itself out of existence with little to show for its efforts — or taxpayers' money — but a few studies and blueprints.

Ken Spisak, a Cahokia village trustee, criticized the funds spent on planning for the theme park — which was projected to lure nearly a million tourists a year — as a waste of money.

"They came in with this pie-in-the-sky idea," Spisak said of the foundation. "And then none of that ever materialized."

Mayor Frank Bergman, who had sat on the foundation board, delivered a softer verdict.

"They had a pretty good plan, but they didn't have money," Bergman said.

Bergman, however, denied the money spent on the theme park idea had gone to waste.

"We use it as a (business) recruiting tool all

Please see PARKS, A2

St. Clair County assessor plans to step down

By GEORGE PAWLACZYK
News-Democrat

BELLEVILLE — St. Clair County Assessor Percy McKinney said Saturday he will not run for re-election in 2006 and may step down before the end of the year.

McKinney, a Democrat who took office in 1993, sent a letter last week to the St. Clair County Democratic Central Committee saying he did not want to be endorsed for another term.

The committee is in the process of selecting candidates for the November 2006 election. Political insiders say that Renee Lewis of the county Board of Review and former East St. Louis Mayor Gordon Bush are being considered for the assessor's job.

"About a year ago, I decided I wanted to do some other things," said McKinney, regarding job offers in the private sector. He declined to give specifics.

"I may be leaving before the end of the year," he said.

McKinney said he is considering stepping down in December to allow a successor the chance to formulate his or her own budget for the

Please see ASSESSOR, A2



McKinney

Signal Hill Lutheran Church minister, wife to leave after 30 years

By MARIA BARAN
News-Democrat

A well-known minister and a popular parenting expert are leaving Belleville after calling it home for 30 years.

The reason for their depar-

ture was as simple as it was prophetic: He was called, she followed.

The Rev. Henry "Hank" Simon, 59, and his wife, Mary Manz Simon, 57, will be moving to Pasadena, Md., after serving Signal Hill Lutheran

Church, 8100 W. Main St., for the past three decades.

"The easy thing would be to stay," Hank Simon said. "I feel that the Lord is calling me to Pasadena."

In Lutheran practice, pastors do not apply to congrega-

tions by sending resumes or sermon tapes. Instead, congregations receive names suggested by their members and church officials.

Galilee Lutheran Church asked him to be its new pastor. In response, he said the Lord

called him to accept.

The religious call probably refers to the Bible, from the Macedonian Call to Apostle Paul (Acts 16:6-10), Hank Simon explained. "The apostle

Please see SIMON, A2

Coming Monday

Red Ribbon kicks off this week in area schools. We'll cover activities in the metro-east all week. We look at binge drinking among teens in Monday's News-Democrat. Other stories will focus on drug abuse and smoking.

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53 Powerball: 17 Jackpot: \$15,000,000

Power Play: 5

Pick 3-Midday: 3-3-7;

Evening: 0-2-4
Pick 4-Midday: 5-7-5-4;
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Show Me 5-Midday:

9-11-19-27-39

Show Me 5-Evening:
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POWERBALL: 6-7-36-51-

