

See live interviews of the Missouri Senate candidates on our website today. Sen. Claire McCaskill will answer questions at 11 a.m. and Rep. Todd Akin at 3 p.m. If you have a question to suggest, email it to questions@news-leader.com or post it on our Facebook page. Visit news-leader.com/senate to watch. The interviews can also be viewed afterward.

SPRINGFIELD NEWS-LEADER

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INSIDE



Multimedia Editor Dean Curtis found the Eleven Point to be a jewel of a river. DEAN CURTIS/NEWS-LEADER

Rivers are ever-changing

According to an old friend of Multimedia Editor Dean Curtis, the Eleven Point River was a miserable river on which to float — long and slow, with no gravel bars for camping. Curtis had to find out for himself, though. After all, even a bad day on the river is better than a good day at the office. **Ozarks Exposure, 6A**

Medical providers on lookout for meningitis

Missouri's top health official has issued a health advisory to the state's medical providers to be on the lookout for cases of fungal meningitis that have sickened people in nine states. No cases of the disease, which involves patients who received an epidural steroid injection, have been reported in Missouri. Area hospitals said they have not purchased medicine from the maker of the recalled drug. **Ozarks, 6A**

Parents share concerns about special-needs center

Some Springfield parents worry that a proposed new early childhood special education center would "segregate" young children with special needs. Last week, Associate Superintendent Justin Herrell asked the school board for approval to step up talks about establishing the new early childhood special education center, starting with three classrooms serving 66 students, in southwest Springfield. **Ozarks, 6A**

Syrup grading gets sticky

Vermont may join with other syrup-producing states and Canadian provinces in selling maple syrup with one grading standard, triggering fears by some producers that the state's vaunted brand will lose its reputation if it doesn't stand out from the rest. **Business, 6B**

Hearing tonight on shelter zoning

Proposed change requires buffer zone between shelters, schools

By Amos Bridges
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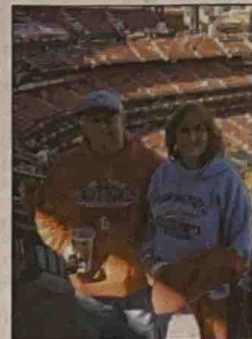
An ordinance prohibiting new homeless shelters from locating near local schools goes to the City Council for a public hearing tonight.

The proposed zoning rule change would require a 1,000-foot buffer between overnight shelters and elementary or secondary schools, a restriction endorsed in a 2008 joint resolution approved by the council, the Greene County Commission

and Springfield Public Schools. It also tweaks the terminology used in Springfield's zoning ordinance to distinguish between shelters serving the homeless and those set up by the Red Cross in the wake of fires and other disasters.

An earlier version of the ordinance also would have lifted a 50-bed limit imposed on all new

See SHELTERS, Page 5A



John and Kim Everest celebrated an early fifth anniversary at Busch Stadium. KARY BOOHER/NEWS-LEADER

Couples share love for Cardinals

Two Ozarks couples celebrate anniversaries at opener of playoffs

By Kary Booher
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ST. LOUIS — The old saying is that a happy wife equals a happy life. In that regard, Springfield's John Everest and Lebanon's Gib Adkins are doing just fine.

The St. Louis Cardinals' 2012 home-opening playoff game Sunday turned into Shangri La for both at Busch Stadium, where they not only cheered on their favorite team but also celebrated their wedding anniversaries.

Even better, they received no arguments from their wives.

John and Kim Everest celebrated an early fifth anniversary at the ballpark, while Adkins and his wife Angie marked their 23rd.

"Men want to go to celebrate at a sporting event, but I didn't mind," Kim said. "I love the Cardinals. And, believe it or not, I was not a baseball fan before I met him."

Turns out, Gib was under orders to attend.

"We are both huge fans. The minute the Cards won Friday (at Atlanta), Angie said, 'Let's get tickets for Sunday,'" Gib explained. "Since our insurance agency we own is closed Monday, she said,

IN SPORTS

» Nationals rally, edge Cardinals in Game 1. **1B**

» Defending champs are in must-win situation. **1B**

TINY BABIES NOW HEALTHY KIDS



The Skiles family greets NICU occupational therapist Ashlea Cardin at the Mercy Hospital NICU reunion Sunday. Three of Justin and Laura Skiles' four kids were in the NICU after birth, including 6-year-old twins Mara and Reagan and 16-month-old Mason. MICHAEL GULLEDGE/NEWS-LEADER

Former NICU patients and families reunite with staff

By Michael Gulledge
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Children at the Skiles home have something rather unusual: a stylish square box filled with tiny medical equipment, socks and diapers.

It's a strange item for a pair of 6-year-old identical

twins to treasure, but it's also a memento of their beginning — one that started in Mercy Hospital's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.

Three of Laura and Justin Skiles' four kids started life inside the NICU. The unit provides specialized care for babies born with medical problems.

"We are frequent fliers," Laura Skiles said.

On Sunday, the Skilesees were among the former patients, parents and family

who joined Mercy's NICU doctors and nurses in a reunion of sorts — a yearly chance to catch up and maintain the friendships built in the first weeks of children's lives.

Hundreds of parents, kids and volunteers were part of the fun-packed meeting filled with music, balloons, cake and games. Along the atrium, nurses and doctors greeted little — and big —

See REUNION, Page 4A

Index

VOL. 122, NO. 282
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Business	6B	Movies	10B
Campus Notes	2A	Nation/World	3A
Classified	7B	Opinion	9A
Comics	9B	Ozarks	6A

See CARDINALS, Page 5A

TINY BABIES NOW HEALTHY KIDS



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See REUNION, Page 4A

Reunion/12,000 babies have been through NICU

Continued from Page 1A

faces they once treated in the NICU.

Skiles twins Mara and Reagan were born 11 weeks early, with Reagan weighing 2 pounds, 11 ounces and Mara 3 pounds, 14 ounces. Their brother, Mason, was born 6 weeks early, weighing in at 5 pounds, 12 ounces. "He looked like a giant compared to the twins," Laura Skiles said.

All three began life in the protective confines of the NICU.

Laura Skiles said for Reagan, a gallon of orange juice was larger than she was. Today, that first diaper of hers is about the size of her 6-year-old hands.

"It was a really terrifying experience," she said. "I was a first-time mom."

Laura Skiles, whose father works at the hospital, knew use of the NICU was possible a few weeks before the birth of the twins. Staff at the hospital gave a tour of the unit in an attempt to prepare the parents for what may be coming. But she said once birth



The Skiles children play at the NICU reunion at Mercy Hospital on Sunday. Three of the family's four kids were in the NICU after birth. MICHAEL GULLEDGE/NEWS-LEADER

came, the babies were quickly brought under a doctor's care.

She said nothing can prepare a parent for not being able to hold their babies after birth. Laura wasn't able to visit her newborns in the NICU, so a nurse would take Polaroid photos throughout the day for her husband to bring her.

"That was really the only connection I had," she said.

Special connections

When occupational therapist Ashlea Cardin met the Skilesees, she had just returned to work after having twins of her own, who were also briefly in the NICU.

"I connected with them right off the bat," she said. The Skilesees joined the lines of people who wanted to see Cardin. She greeted the Skilesees like everyone else: with a huge smile and excitement.

"Our girls have gone to birthday parties together," she said. They also keep in touch through Facebook.

Cardin said this reunion is something she looks forward to all year.

"Kids are so fascinatingly resilient," Cardin said. "For every sad story we have, we have 1,000 kids going 'watch this.'"

"It's amazing," she said. "I love my job."

Reunions shows growth, health

Laura Skiles said attending her first NICU reunion allowed the family to see older NICU kids who

grew up to be healthy children.

"That just has a huge impact on you," she said.

Candace Burnett's baby, now 5-month-old Emma Rose, spent about five days in the NICU. This was the first reunion for the family.

"It's good to know that they're all happy and healthy and doing so well," she said. "It's kind of cool that they're all different ages and sizes."

Burnett said the nurses worked to make sure her daughter felt special when she was in the NICU — that's why she wanted to see them again.

The NICU was opened about 30 years ago by Dr. Melinda Slack and has continuously expanded since, including a newly remodeled unit that opens in December. Kids ran up to her Sunday, and she knew them by name.

"To put it in perspec-

ive, we've had 12,000 babies come through the intensive care nursery since I've come to Mercy 30 years ago," she said.

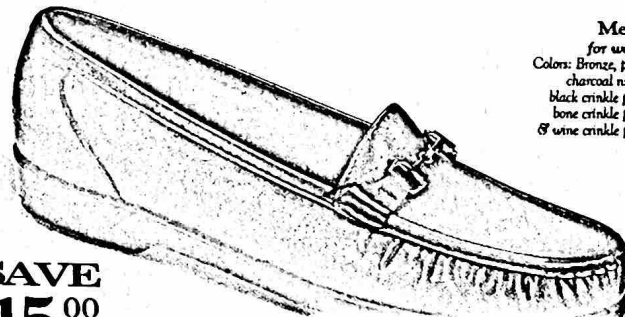
Each birth celebrated Sunday involved a special story — as special as the Skiles twins' box of NICU mementos.

"Sometimes on their birthday, we pull out the stuff and talk about the blessing and what a special birth they were," Laura Skiles said.



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