

METRO DIGEST NEWS FROM AROUND THE REGION

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Body

Illinois

Metro East

Operation Safe Kids events set

Operation Safe Kids fingerprinting events are being held today and Saturday in St. Clair, Madison and Monroe counties, the U.S. attorney's office said, to provide parents with vital information for use in case of a child abduction or disappearance.

Using the U.S. Secret Service's Livescan Child ID system, various law enforcement agencies will provide parents with a document containing the child's photograph, digitized, inkless fingerprints and other identification information.

Events will be held this evening from 4 to 7 at the First Baptist Church of Maryville at 7110 State Route 162, and from 9 a.m. to noon Saturday at the American Legion at 375 East Locust Street in Columbia and the Glen Carbon Public Safety Facility at 149 North Main Street.

Events at both times will be held at 301 Riverview Park, East St. Louis; Kmart at 3655 Nameoki Road in Granite City; O'Fallon Community Park, East Fifth Street; St. Clair Square Mall; and Columbia Market Place at 1000 Columbia Centre in Columbia.

There will also be an event from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday at DM Communications at Frank Scott Parkway and Route 13.

Police focus on seat belt law

Illinois State Police on Thursday launched their largest ever "after-dark enforcement effort" to make sure people wear their seat belts through next holiday weekend, the state Department of Transportation said.

During the Memorial Day "Click it or Ticket" campaign, motorists can expect more than 3,600 safety belt enforcement zones around the state. Almost 700 of these zones are planned for after the sun goes down - that's when surveys show more drivers don't buckle up.

State will offer free boat inspections

Illinois Department of Natural Resources will hold free boat inspections for the public on Sunday.

Conservation police officers will be checking watercraft's registration, lighting and availability of personal flotation devices, among other things. Citations will not be issued.

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The public boating inspections are one component of the department's safe boating awareness and education efforts, and kicks off National Safe Boating Week, May 19-25.

In the **Metro** East area, officers will check boats from 1 to 3 p.m. at the Grafton public boat ramp and at the Allen Branch boat ramp at Eldon Hazlet State Park in Carlyle.

Madison County

Rezoning of Wal-Mart site is backed

GODFREY - The Planning and Zoning Commission has voted 5-2 in favor of rezoning about 37 acres where a developer hopes to build a Wal-Mart and a strip mall.

The proposed development, which would also have room for other businesses, is at the southwest corner of the intersection of Godfrey and Airport roads. The rezoning would change the land's designation to commercial from agricultural.

Close to 100 people attended the commission meeting Wednesday at the Knights of Columbus hall. Developer Scott Adams and business owners Kevin Barbier and William St. Peters supported the rezoning. They cited increased tax revenue, the potential attraction of other businesses and service providers because of the Wal-Mart, and general continued growth of the Riverbend area.

Opponents pointed to potential disruption to the environment, a need for a thorough geological study and a concern about surrounding property values.

The Planning and Zoning Commission's approval will be taken to the Village Board meeting on June 4.

Elsewhere

SIUC music school gets \$1 million gift

CARBONDALE - A professor has given a posthumous gift of more than \$1 million to the School of Music at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

Steven Barwick joined the school's faculty in 1955 and retired in 1988. He died in January 2006. Barwick left the bulk of his estate to the SIU Foundation. The money is earmarked for the School of Music to establish a scholarship fund for piano students.

Rickey N. McCurry, CEO of the SIU Foundation, said Barwick's generosity is his legacy to music students. "The gift demonstrates how much he revered students in the School of Music," he said.

U of I OKs divestment tied to Sudan

CHICAGO - University of Illinois trustees voted Thursday to sell off \$2.3 million in investments in four companies that do business in Sudan.

In the past four years, more than 200,000 people have died and 2.5 million have been displaced in fighting between black African rebels in the Darfur **region** and government forces and their allied Arab militia, known as the janjaweed.

Several dozen other American universities have passed similar measures.

Thursday's unanimous vote requires the university to divest its holding in any companies doing business in Sudan by June 30.

An Illinois law created in 2005 bars the state government from investing in Sudan. The state sold about \$1 billion in investments.

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MISSOURI

Top public defender in St. Louis quits

The head of the public defender's office in St. Louis stepped down from his post Wednesday with little explanation.

District Defender Eric Affholter resigned from the Missouri State Public Defender system effective immediately. He led about two dozen attorneys who represent criminal defendants in St. Louis who cannot afford a lawyer.

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