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HOLOCAUST: During World War II, George Brady survived a Nazi concentration camp. His sister and parents did not. On Tuesday, his words touched a group of Belleville junior high school students.



Provided photo

George Brady sent a personally signed photograph of him and his sister, Hana Brady, that was originally taken in 1935 to students at West Junior High School in Belleville. The students read the book "Hana's Suitcase."

STUDENTS TOUCH HISTORY



DERIK HOLTSMANN/News-Democrat

West Junior High student Damion Phipps looks at the family portrait sent to his language arts class by George Brady.

BY SCOTT WUERZ
News-Democrat

BELLEVILLE — Students at West Junior High School were touched by history Tuesday.

Last semester during their language arts class, the students read "Hana's Suitcase," a book about a young boy who survived the Holocaust but lost his sister and parents to the Nazi gas chambers at Auschwitz.

The students were so moved by the story and a trip to the Holocaust Museum in St. Louis that they wrote to the boy in the book — now a man in his mid-80s — to express their sorrow for the loss of his family and to ask about his experience.

The letter, written before Christmas break, was all but forgotten by the students when, on Tuesday morning, teacher Shari Tockstein called them out of their classes to reconvene one last time.

"Remember when you wrote that letter to the man who survived the Holocaust?" Tockstein asked. "Well, he wrote back."

Sniffing back tears, Tockstein told her class that the survivor, George Brady, who now lives in Toronto, not only penned a response, but also sent each student a per-



The cover of the book "Hana's Suitcase" by Karen Levine.



Brady

sonally signed photo of himself with his sister when they were children.

Tockstein read the letter to her class, fighting back tears.

"Nothing can change the loss of my sister," Brady said in his letter. "But knowing that she is remembered, and perhaps even improving the world, makes an enormous difference."

Please see HOLOCAUST, A2

Belleville to get 7 new restaurants

Fast-food sites planned at developments

BY LAURA GIRRESCH
News-Democrat

BELLEVILLE — Mayor Mark Eckert announced Tuesday that the city will get at least seven new restaurants, including four in the Belleville Crossing shopping center off Illinois 15 and two at Green Mount Commons on Carlyle Avenue.

The new restaurants at Belleville Crossing will be Wendy's, Arby's, Qdoba Mexican Grill and Buffalo Wild Wings, and most should be open by the end of the year.

Also, there's a "strong lead" on a White Castle restaurant at that location, Eckert said.

There will be a Wendy's and a Hardee's opening at Green Mount Commons, near the new Wal-Mart Supercenter, by the end of the summer, Eckert said.

Also, a McDonald's is planned for the intersection

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of Illinois 177 and Green Mount Road and could open by the end of the year.

There is no indication that older locations of the restaurants will be closing, Eckert said.

He said the city still is pursuing sit-down restaurants for Belleville Crossing and Green Mount Commons, and he said that he'd be willing to discuss offering economic incentives to the first restaurant to step to the plate. While Buffalo Wild Wings is a sit-down establishment, he'd also like to see something that has a wider menu.

None of the restaurants has been promised any financial incentives yet, though they may still receive some.

Typically, sit-down restaurants don't choose to come in until the late stages of a development, said Scott Sachtleben, senior vice pres-

Please see BELLEVILLE, A2

Former area man swept into river

West grad was member of '97 baseball team

BY RICKEENA J. RICHARDS
News-Democrat

WILDWOOD, Mo. — Missouri State Water Patrol crews ended the first day of their search for a 27-year-old man, formerly of Millstadt, who was swept into the Missouri River on Tuesday morning after his canoe capsized.

Keith Fietsam, who public records show lived in Millstadt before moving to his current O'Fallon, Mo., address, was last seen about 100 yards from a dam trying to swim to shore after the current threw him from the canoe shortly be-

fore 5 a.m. Although the Water Patrol statement lists Fietsam as a fatality, public information officer Lou Amighetti said crews "can only suspect he is missing."

"We have nothing to rule out that he is alive, and we have nothing to rule out that he is dead," Amighetti said.

Fietsam and Leo Geringer were in the boat on their way to Howell Island near Chesterfield to go turkey hunting. According to a release on the Water Patrol Web site, they were thrown from the canoe after they got too close to a low head dam in "very strong current," which washed the boat over the dam and flipped it

Please see RIVER, A2

Edwardsville getting stronger, mayor says

City's property value up 10 percent

BY ELIZABETH DONALD
News-Democrat



Niebur

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EDWARDSVILLE — Despite a floundering economy, Mayor Gary Niebur says Edwardsville is strong and getting stronger.

Niebur opened the fiscal year with his annual State of the City address. Despite the growing economic woes throughout the country and high foreclosure rates, Edwardsville's property values went up 10 percent last year to

a total value of more than \$500 million. That's up from about \$100 million in 1989.

Meanwhile, Niebur said, the tax rate has gone down almost every year. He said less than 22 percent of a property owner's bill goes to city expenses.

Please see MAYOR, A2

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COMING THURSDAY:
Celebrity impersonators coming to Belleville



Veteran school board member retires

Wagner served District 201 for 19 years

BY SCOTT WUERZ
News-Democrat

Sandy Wagner, a veteran of the Belleville Township High School District board for 19 years, has decided it's time to retire.

She has turned in her resignation a year short of the end of her term. The school board, which oversees Belleville East and Belleville West high schools, will meet Monday to discuss her replacement.

"When I got on that board a long, long time ago, I ran because I felt like the people who were on there had been on there too long and it was time for some new blood," Wagner said. "Now I'm the person who

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has been on there too long, and I want to step aside to let somebody else bring some new ideas in."

District 201 President Kurt Schroeder said he's sorry to see Wagner go.

"I certainly regret losing a board member like Sandy," Schroeder said. "She has been a valuable member of the 201 school board for many years, and she will be difficult to replace."

Wagner said she's proud of the many things the school board did during her tenure,

About Sandy Wagner



Age: 56
Home: Millstadt
Job: Owns Wagner Buick-Pontiac-GMC in Belleville with husband, Rusty
Children: Three grown children: Michael 36; David, 34; Amy, 32

which started in 1989 when her oldest son, Michael, was at Belleville East. But the single biggest thing she'll remember

Please see BOARD, A2