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Year in Review: the top stories that made headlines in 2003

Witches didn't fly in on broomsticks but they did fly to the top of the list of the top local stories of 2003.

Wiccan members of the Corellian Tradition announced in June that they planned to open WitchSchool in the former Grant Township Building at 200 E. Penn.

The announcement set off a flurry of activity both in the media and among area churches. Some ministers called for a day of prayer at and on June 30, approximately 100 people gathered in front of the building to pray.

Members of the sect attended the July 1 city council meeting and, after the meeting officially closed, heard from area people who did not want the school in Hoopeston. The exchange caused one of the group's leaders, Ed Hubbard, to say he would not open the school in the city.

The issue received a small degree of national attention. Citing religious intolerance, Hubbard posted his side of the story on various internet news sources, prompting emails from some Wiccans across the country to local media. Some criticized Hoopeston for its intolerance; others criticized Hubbard for planning to open WitchSchool in a small community.

After the August Neighborhood Watch meeting, at

which some Corellian members spoke, and after receiving support from some local residents, Hubbard opened The Broom Closet, a book store, in early September. Later that month, the Tradition leased 112 W. Main to open the Vermilion Arts Center.

Other top stories of 2003 include:

2. Discussions between Rossville-Alvin and Hoopeston Area schools about merging sports programs. In March, the Rossville-Alvin board approached Hoopeston Area about co-oping all sports. HA officials offered to co-op sports as needed. In May, both boards met to discuss the possibility of sharing more academics as well.

In June, when it looked like Rossville-Alvin would form a cooperative high school with Bismarck-Henning, Hoopeston Area offered to meet B-H's offer, opening all areas to discussion. At June's Hoopeston Area School Board meeting, residents turned out in force to as the board to keep the Cornjerker mascot if the districts merged. A petition with 1,072 signatures was presented to the board regarding keeping the mascot.

As the year ends, the districts, along with Bismarck-Henning, Armstrong and Potomac are part of a feasibility study requested by Rossville-Alvin. The study is expected to be completed by February and will show the options available and will provide a direction for the Rossville-Alvin board.

3. Water - lots and lots of it - had a major impact on the area's economy. Heavy rains during Labor Day weekend drowned most of the National Sweetcorn Festival, sponsored by the Hoopeston Jaycees.

Money raised during the festival is used to pay for the organization's Christmas programs for senior citizens and underprivileged children. Those programs were in danger but local residents stepped up and held fundrais-

See HEADLINES on other side

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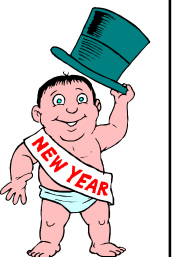
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9-close

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Free pool & juke box from 9:30 p.m.
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**Just
the Facts
will not be
printed New
Year's Eve and
New Year's Day.
Publication
will resume
Friday!**

Headlines continued from other side

ers that enabled the Jaycees to hold their programs.

The rain also ruined the 50th annual Farm Progress Show, held in September near Henning. The event was expected to be a financial boost for Vermilion County.

4. Project Playground, sponsored by Beta Sigma Phi - Psi Iota, received more than \$50,000 to put new playground equipment at McFerren Park. Started in 2001, Hoopeston individuals, businesses and groups donated to the project, which replaced equipment which had been at the park since 1965.

5. Hoopeston Community Memorial Hospital lost steam on a construction project and its CEO in 2003. In April, construction on a \$1.2 million project was halted pending the results of a criminal investigation. The issue was taken before a grand jury.

Later in April, hospital board president Russ Leigh announced that Frank Caruso was no longer CEO of the facility. A statement issued by the board said Caruso voluntarily resigned his position. Mike Brown was named hospital CEO in September.

6. Tax Increment Financing districts in Hoopeston and Rossville were noteworthy this year. Hoopeston's TIF plan included incorrect information, resulting in the city receiving \$112,000 too much. The money will be de-

ducted from future payments.

In Rossville, a TIF district is being discussed but questions from members of a Joint Review Board have hampered its completion.

7. The Hoopeston Area district made the list again with a planned change in its extracurricular policy. The change was implemented after an August incident involving students at a party at an abandoned house outside the city limits. After heated discussions between residents and the board and among board members, the new policy was approved in November.

8. It was announced in 2003 that Hoopeston will lose another business. FMC announced it will sell the local plant to OXBO International Corp., which will transfer operations to Byron, NY. About 35 jobs will be lost.

9. A piece of Hoopeston history went up in smoke in May when an old warehouse on the former Stokely property burned. It was the second fire in less than a decade at the plant, which closed in 1998.

10. The glory days of Hoopeston are being captured on video for posterity. The Golden Years of Hoopeston, conceived by Tom Mills of Rossville, will show Hoopeston in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. It is expected to be completed early next year.

Obituaries

HUNT - Steven Hunt, 47, of Rantoul, formerly of Rossville, died at 4:40 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 27, 2003 at Carle Foundation Hospital, Urbana. Funeral services will be at 2 p.m. Tuesday at Rossville United Methodist Church. Burial will be in Mann's Chapel Cemetery, Rossville. Visitation will be one hour before services Tuesday at the church. Wolfe Funeral Home, Rossville, was in charge of arrangements. Memorials are suggested to Rossville United Methodist Church.

JONES - Mary Maple Jones, 99, of Hoopeston died at 3:35 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 25, 2003 at Baptist East Hospital, Memphis, Tenn. Funeral services were at 1 p.m. Monday at United Methodist Church, Hoopeston. Burial was in Floral Hill Cemetery. Visitation was prior to services Monday. Hamilton-Orr Funeral Home was in charge of arrangements. Memorials are suggested to United Methodist Church, Hoopeston.

MELIKYAN - M. Anahit Melikyan, 89, of Hoopeston, died at 10:50 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 25, 2003 at

home. Funeral services will be at 7 p.m. Tuesday at Sunset Funeral Home and Cremation Center, Danville. Visitation will be 5-7 p.m. Tuesday at the funeral home.

SNIVELY - Mary Lou Snively, 76, of Hoopeston, died at 4:50 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 27, 2003 at Carle Foundation Hospital, Urbana. Funeral services will be at 1 p.m. Tuesday at Hamilton-Orr Funeral Home. Burial will be in Floral Hill Cemetery. Visitation will be 11 a.m.-1 p.m. at the funeral home. Memorials are suggested to Hoopeston Public Library or American Cancer Society.

Weather



Partly to mostly cloudy today through Thursday. High today 45, low 31. Tomorrow's high 44, low 30. Thursday's high 44, low 37.

For current weather conditions, call Hoopeston Weather Service, (217) 283-6221.

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