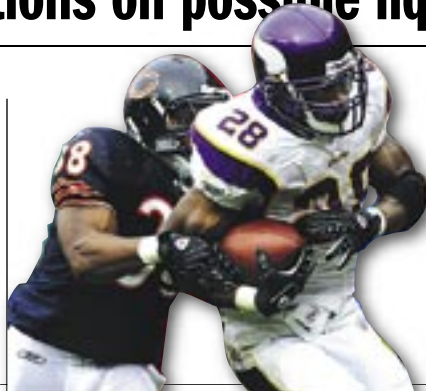




YOUR FAMILY, C6

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Peoria mechanic gives back to community by taking time to mentor at-risk kids.



SPORTS, D1

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State's election influence grows

Illinois primary is set for date that could be 'do or die' in presidential nominating contest

BY AARON CHAMBERS
OF GATEHOUSE NEWS SERVICE

SPRINGFIELD — Illinois is poised to play a role in the presidential nominating process for a change.

Democratic and Republican nominees for president may remain undecided on Feb. 5, when Illinois holds its primary election, and the state could help decide them. In recent presidential

elections, each party's candidate was determined well before mid-March, when Illinois finally weighed in.

Other states with early nominating contests, including traditional leadoff states Iowa and New Hampshire, essentially decided the nominees for us.

"It's good to have our state involved," said House Minority Leader Tom Cross, R-Oswego.

More than 20 states will hold nominating contests — primary elections or caucuses — for one or both parties on Feb. 5, making the day something of a national primary election. The collective push forward has only intensified interest in Iowa and New Hampshire, as presidential contenders hope to win momentum heading into Feb. 5.

Iowa and New Hampshire haven't nailed down their dates yet, but they're expected to be among nine states voting before Feb. 5, according to Stateline.org, a not-for-profit news service covering state government policy and politics.

While a tight presidential primary race could draw Illinois voters to the polls in February, they may stay home if the weather is harsh. Political organizers are already developing get-out-the-vote drives to help counter this.

Then again, election officials hope folks take advantage of the state's early voting option. Beginning Jan. 14, voters can cast ballots at locations designated by local election authorities. Illinois started early voting in 2006, the last election cycle.

Please see PRIMARY, Page A7

Crackdown driving up cocaine prices

Boost in cost has hit Peoria, but pinch in supply hasn't

BY FRANK RADOSEVICH II
OF THE JOURNAL STAR

PEORIA — Citing a string of drug seizures made earlier this year, authorities say the supply of cocaine has dropped sharply in 37 U.S. cities, driving the price to record levels, according to a report released this month by the nation's "drug czar."

John P. Walters, director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, said in the report that increased pressure from law enforcement at the U.S.-Mexico border has helped crack down on drug trafficking organizations.

Law enforcement officials in central Illinois echoed the report's findings, saying they too have seen a jump in the cost.

"Everybody's agreeing that the price is going up," said Peoria Police Lt. Tom Burke, who heads the department's vice unit.

Since March, the average price for one gram of cocaine rose 24 percent across the country — from \$95.89 to \$118.70 — reaching its highest point in the last five years and nearly doubling in some cities.

Despite the tight supplies, however, authorities admit cocaine is only more expensive, not harder to find.

South Peoria activist LaVetta Ricca agrees with that assessment. "It's still prevalent," she said of the drug trade in her neighborhood. "I haven't noticed any decrease, if that's what you think."

Please see COCAINE, Page A7

EVERY DOG HAS HIS DAY AT ANNUAL BARK IN THE PARK EVENT



PURCHASE THESE PHOTOS AT PJSTAR.COM

From left, Old English sheep dogs Sheba, Winnie and Shelby enjoy a mild October day with owner Emily Coumbe of Dunlap, hidden at left, and her co-worker Kellie Tomlinson of Brimfield at Bark in the Park on the Peoria riverfront Sunday afternoon. "They're real clowns," laughed Coumbe. The annual event raises money for the Peoria Humane Society.

Gone to the dogs

Annual event gives owners fun day along riverfront with their canine pals

PEORIA

Huebi's online personality is infectious. So much so that one of his 237 friends on the social-networking Web site Myspace.com drove across two states to meet him.

But who couldn't love Huebi, a pug and beagle mix known as a puggle? Especially when his owner converses with others online, pretending to summarize Huebi's day in first person.

"He's following in my footsteps," own-

er Nicole Easton said. "I met my husband online five years ago, now he's going to meet a little someone. All my friends have Myspace pages with their dogs."

Easton of Mackinaw, who refers to herself as a "crazy dog lady," and her friends attended the 11th annual Bark in the Park on Sunday on the riverfront.

The Peoria Humane Society hosted the event, which featured a "marvelous mutt show," a canine carnival, paw print painting, dog Olympics, souvenir dog photos, children's activities and the naming of a bark king and queen.

A dog costume contest, with the winner decided by fan applause, was a crowd favorite.

Another contest had owners describe

Please see DOGS, Page A8



Melissa Stevenson of Peoria gives a hug to her dog Bacchus, a 3-year-old boxer, on Sunday at Bark in the Park. Stevenson said she entered him in the costume contest dressed as a fighting boxer last year and won first place. "He's not liking the pompoms," she said of this year's cheerleader costume.

Story by ED McMENAMIN ♦ Photographs by ADAM GERIK ♦ of the Journal Star

Cancer death rates see bigger drop

Decline in colorectal malignancies helps, so does better screening, treatment

BY LAURAN NEERGAARD
AP MEDICAL WRITER

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Good news on the cancer front: Death rates are dropping faster than ever, thanks to new progress against colorectal cancer.

A turning point came in 2002, scientists conclude today in the annual "Report to the Nation" on cancer. Between 2002 and 2004, death rates dropped by an average of 2.1 percent a year.

That may not sound like much, but between 1993 and 2001, death rates dropped on average 1.1 percent a year.

The big change was a two-pronged gain against colorectal cancer.

While it remains the nation's No. 2 cancer killer, deaths are dropping faster for colorectal cancer than for any other malignancy — by almost 5 percent a year among men and 4.5 percent among women.

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