People in the news

New ABC anchor: 'This is Joan's time'

Lisa McRee doesn't want any fuss.

McRee

The woman hired to replace **Joan Lunden** on "Good Morning America" doesn't want her arrival to eclipse the morning show veteran's departure.

"This is really Joan's time," McRee said in the July 12 TV Guide. "She needs to have a really great and singular goodbye experience. She deserves to do a victory lap."

After 17 years on the ABC show, Lunden is leaving in September. Her replacement, an anchorman in Los Angeles, didn't pursue the job.

"This wasn't one of my ambitions. I mean a long time ago when I was younger I thought, 'Gee, what would be the greatest job? A morning show.' But I consciously shelved that dream," she said.

Climate has warmed for all-women tour

For singer **Sarah McLachlan**, finding the talent for an all-women summer music tour was easy. Timing was the tricky part.

"If we had tried to do this three years ago, we would have been laughed at, the climate was so different," said McLachlan, founder of the traveling festival, the Lilith Fair, which rolls into Riverport Amphitheatre on July 15.

Among performers taking part are **Tracy Chapman**, **Suzanne Vega** and **Indigo Girls**.

The Lilith Fair — named for Adam's first wife, before the creation of Eve, according to medieval Jewish folklore — won't always be a woman-only event if McLachlan has her way.

"This is just the beginning," McLachlan said. "But it's a good place to start. I'd like to see it continue to grow, and ultimately have men headlining. It's not just about women; it's about a sense of community."

'Family Matters' star wants to be 'bad guy'

Reginald VelJohnson, a pudgy pushover on the sitcom "Family Matters," wants to change his image.

"I've always been a good guy in my movies and after eight years of 'Family Matters,' people think only of light comedy when they think of me," VelJohnson said. "Now I want to be a bad guy."

For the time being, however, it's more of the same. VelJohnson, who plays a bumbling father on the sitcom, is taping shows for the ninth season of "Family Matters," which stars **Jaleel White** as nerdy Steve Urkel.

But VelJohnson, who has written three scripts for the TV show, also is working on film screenplays.

"I'm going to play a heavy dramatic role one of these days even if I have to write it myself," said VelJohnson, whose film credits include "Die Hard," "Crocodile Dundee," "Ghostbusters" and "Posse."

Eaglets, troubled kids soar together

Associated Press

AP

FIXING FOOD: Four members of a conservation corps prepared fish for a baby bald eagle.

WASHINGTON — Urlick Evans gazed at the caged eagle 60 feet up in an old cottonwood and the bird glared down at him, two proud creatures struggling to adapt to their environment.

"He's wild," the 21-year-old former son of the streets said. "I was pretty much wild then, too."

The eagle, named Hoptowit, is one of four bald eaglets being raised in temporary captivity on the banks of the Anacostia River in hopes of repopulating the nation's capital with the national symbol. Evans is one of 12 young men and women from Washington's poorest neighborhoods working to make that dream — and a few of their own — come true.

The two were brought together by the Earth Conservation Corps, a nonprofit group that was the brainchild of documentary filmmaker Robert Nixon. The corps tries to help kids from Washington's public housing projects, along with American Indians from five Northwestern tribes, escape the double-barreled threat of poverty and crime by helping threatened species and habitats survive the scourge of man.

"It is a tough old world out there if you're a young eagle," said Paul Nickerson, an endangered species specialist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Humans pose the greatest threat to bald eagles through loss of habitat. But the North American bald eagle has made a spectacular comeback in the 25 years since the pesticide DDT was banned. From a 1960s low of 417 nesting pairs in the lower 48 states, the number has soared well past 5,000 nesting pairs today.

The rebound is so encouraging that bald eagles were downgraded from an endangered to a threatened species in 1995, and eventually might be removed from the list altogether.

"They're doing great," Nickerson said. "As the human population increases, the eagles are getting more tolerant and will nest in trees that are not as buffered from humankind as they used to prefer."

But bald eagles are not yet nesting in the nation's capital, and that's what the Earth Conservation Corps hopes to change.

Each summer since 1995, the group has relocated four eaglets from Wisconsin, where bald eagles are plentiful, to the 444-acre U.S. National Arboretum and the towering cottonwoods along the Anacostia. The birds from this year will be freed later this month.

It's too soon to tell whether the experiment is working; bald eagles don't start breeding until they are 4 or 5 years old. But the habitat is conducive — about 10 pairs are nesting outside the city — and eagles typically return to nest where they were raised.

The young guardians are engaged in a struggle of their own. Two corps members were suspended temporarily for stealing, and the eaglets are named for four former corps members who were killed by guns or drugs.

Corps members gather early every morning to feed and monitor the birds. To avoid human imprinting, they use a bucket-and-rope pulley system for feeding.

Three members hide behind a bank of trees and load a tin bucket with donated day-old fish that is sprinkled with vitamin powder. Then, using the pulley, they raise the bucket to a point above the cage and jerk the rope until the food tumbles down to the birds.

The young conservationists, who also clean up the Anacostia's tributaries, complain they are paid below minimum wage for 40 hours a week of hot, dirty work. But their $4.53 an hour, as national service volunteers, is considered a stipend from AmeriCorps, which finances part of the Earth Conservation Corps' work.

Daredevil divers make big splash at amusement park in Kansas City, Mo.

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The latest heart-stopping attraction at a Kansas City amusement park has divers plummeting as much as 90 feet into a concrete-bottomed tank containing just 9 feet of water.

It's an adrenaline rush for the divers, Eileen Maul said.

"I love it," said Maul, who takes the plunge from 65 feet and leaves the higher dives to others, for now. "You get hooked on it."

Worlds of Fun brought in the diving show this year to take the place of its dolphin exhibit. Animal rights protesters had complained for years that the tank, which measures 35 feet across and 9 feet deep, wasn't big enough.

A few more feet of water would be fine with the divers, too. But they understand that their plunges sell tickets.

"We would all prefer that it be deeper," said diver Jack Walsh, who has high-dived into pools as shallow as 7 feet.

"But you're never going to get ideal conditions. It's ideal for the customers to watch the show. It's what the audience thinks, not what we think."

All of the performers are skilled divers. Several have won titles and have performed around the world.

Walsh and Brian Wells handle the highest dives at Worlds of Fun. Walsh has made thousands of high dives since 1978. Wells has been doing the long dives for nine years.

"It's not something you practice; you just do it," Wells said. "I used to get pretty nervous. But it's not that scary anymore. I channel all my nerves into focusing on the dive."

Most of the 20-minute show is silly. The performers don costumes, and diver Mike Brady plays the role of obnoxious emcee. To make sure the audience knows he is the butt of the jokes, Brady wears a jersey bearing the name of former Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Steve Bono.

"People around here associate a clown with Bono," Walsh said.

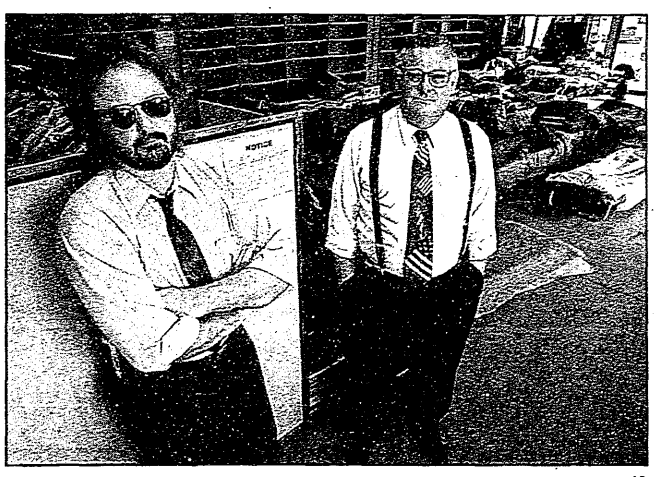
But the true excitement of the show comes when Walsh begins his lonely climb up the 90-foot ladder.

As Walsh perches atop the tower, Maul crouches at the edge of the pool and splashes the water. If she didn't, Walsh — falling faster than 60 mph — could not differentiate between the surface of the pool and the concrete bottom.

"It's a dangerous jump," Walsh said. "I know what could happen if I make a mistake. I've had my share of spills and painful moments, but nothing real serious."

City, preacher battle over camp for homeless

Associated Press



AP

STANDING FIRM: Drake, right, and his attorney, Jon Alexander.

BUENA PARK, Calif. — It's difficult to say which would be worse for this Orange County city in the shadow of Disneyland and Knott's Berry Farm: losing its case against the Rev. Wiley Drake or winning it.

A flamboyant preacher who favors suspenders and a tie emblazoned with the American flag and the Statue of Liberty, the Arkansas-reared, Texas-trained Drake goes on trial today for letting homeless people camp in the parking lot of his First Southern Baptist Church.

Locking him up for violating anti-camping laws temporarily may solve Buena Park's problem with Drake's homeless people. It won't solve Buena Park's problem with Drake.

"Paul the Apostle ran the church from jail," said Drake, who faces a maximum 4½ years behind bars on nine misdemeanor counts. "I've seen enough Mafia movies to know that I can run this ministry from jail."

In citing the city for showing intolerance to a group some find objectionable, Drake, 53, is a curious messenger.

Drake himself has been criticized for intolerance — as author of the Southern Baptists' boycott of Walt Disney Co. for corporate practices that include health benefits for partners of gay employees.

Drake said the boycott and the lawsuit are "apples and oranges" and that he has all the tolerance in the world for homosexuals, even those who may be sleeping in cars and beat-up motor homes in the parking lot of his cinder block church.

He said the difference between his actions and those of Disney is that he embraces homosexuals with the idea of converting them, while Disney embraces them with the idea of validating their lifestyles.

"We're talking about a tolerance of people who want help, a tolerance of people's condition," he said. "We are tolerant of people whether they have a drug addiction or alcohol addiction or whether they are homosexuals."

He added, "If you're a homosexual and you're not willing to seek a conversion to sexual purity, you're out of here."

For now, this city of 74,000 people wants all the homeless people out of the church lot.

The trial culminates months of fruitless negotiations with Drake to get him to comply with basic ordinances, city officials say.

"He's the most stubborn man I've ever met," Assistant City Prosecutor Gregory P. Palmer said. "We don't want him to go to jail, of course, but what are our options? We have no other option. We have worked with him until we were blue in the face. We have made agreement after agreement with him. He has taken us out to the end of our rope."

The city has pursued civil and criminal actions against the church. The civil case, still pending, relates to alleged code violations in an enclosed patio where about two dozen homeless people sleep on cots each night.

In the criminal case, the city alleges that Drake's homeless encampment is increasing crime and lowering property values in this mixed neighborhood of stores, light industry and middle-class homes.

The city plans to introduce police statistics showing that of the 153 calls for police assistance from the city's 26 churches in the last two years, 70 came from just one church: First Southern Baptist.

Hallelujah! Crisis ends for Harlem Boys Choir

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Eight months ago, the famed Boys Choir of Harlem had a $400,000 budget gap and an uncertain future.

But an outpouring of support from foundations, corporations and individuals brought in double what was needed. The choir keeps singing — and all 26 graduates from its Choir Academy were accepted into college.

"Thanks, America!" Walter Turnbull, the group's founder and artistic director, said last week. "Over 700 people contributed all kinds of support, everything from a dollar bill to $100 to $10,000. People really came to our aid."

A total of $800,000 was raised for the group's $3.2 million budget. Some of the windfall will be used to restructure its accounting practices.

"We don't anticipate that kind of crisis again," said Horace Turnbull, Walter's brother, who handles the finances.

Founded in 1968, the choir's repertoire ranges from spirituals to Bach to pop standards.

Performances and recordings generate nearly half of the group's income, but most of that money pays for tours, travel and accommodations. The rest pays for teaching, training and counseling for the choir, and its counterpart, the Girls Choir of Harlem.

"Besides the choir being a safe environment, it's not just about music — it's about socializing the child — values, discipline, all that," said Jose Suazo, 19, who graduated this year. He plans to study mechanical engineering at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh in the fall.

All 560 students attend a public school called the Choir Academy, but the choir pays for counselors, tutors, musical training and a mandatory summer institute.

"Singing is not all what we're about," Walter Turnbull said. "It's also the counseling, the tutoring. Most people are not aware of the depth of our program and the breadth of what we do."

Correction

A rental car discovered with a dead body in its trunk Friday afternoon was parked in the MetroLink lot at the corner of Fifth and Missouri streets in East St. Louis. A story Saturday on Page 1B of the Belleville News-Democrat incorrectly reported that the car was in the parking lot near the Casino Queen gambling riverboat.

The News-Democrat welcomes calls from readers concerning errors and will make appropriate corrections promptly. To report an error call (618) 239-2451, or (800) 642-3878, Ext. 2451.

Belleville News-Democrat

Vol. 122, No. 188 published daily and Sunday by the Belleville News-Democrat, a Knight-Ridder newspaper, 120 S. Illinois St., P.O. Box 427, Belleville, Ill. 62222. (UPS 049-080)

Postmaster: Send address change to the Belleville News-Democrat, P.O. Box 427, Belleville, Ill. 62222. Periodicals postage paid at Belleville, Ill. 62220.