

BRIEFS

Deputies rescue jet skier floating in Oneida Lake

A 21-year-old man thrown from a jet ski drifted for almost two hours in heavy waves in Oneida Lake's South Bay Friday night before being fished out of the water by marine sheriff's deputies, police said.

Timothy J. McMahon of Rochester was cold and shivering slightly, but otherwise uninjured, said Lt. Edward Keim, pilot of the Oneida County Sheriff's Department marine patrol boat.

"He was waving his arms," Keim said. "He said he had tried to swim, but the waves were taking him wherever they wanted."

McMahon had set out from the eastern shore of South Bay at about 8 p.m., Keim said.

The jet skier had arrived at Lewis Point, a mile away, when high waves threw him from his jet ski. A friend riding a second jet ski found McMahon's jet ski, but not McMahon, and returned to shore to alert police.

Keim launched his 30-foot marine cruiser into 6- to 7-foot waves off Sylvan Beach at 9 p.m.

"They were the worst waves I've seen this summer," Keim said. "We were searching such a large area, and it was so dark and windy. The waves were rolling us around."

Keim and Deputy Bill Pouliot were soon accompanied by an Onondaga County helicopter equipped with flood lights. But it was Oneida County sheriff's deputies on land who an hour later, hearing a shout, directed Keim to waters off South Bay's eastern shore.

McMahon had been bobbing around for two hours and been blown back to where he had started.

"He said he was very happy to see us, and that he'd learned a very valuable lesson," Keim said. "Not to go out there when the waves are so rough."

McMahon rested and warmed himself in a cabin on shore and was treated briefly by members of the Sylvan Beach Fire Department. He refused further medical treatment, police said.

Keim, commander of the marine patrol, credited a life vest with saving McMahon's life.

Keim said state law requires riders of jet skis and other craft to carry a sound-producing device — for example, a whistle — as well as a 1-foot-square distress flag.

"It could have been tragic, instead of having a happy ending," Keim said. "I thought it was going to be tragic."

— Paul Lipkowitz

2 men accused of firing gun at party in Hastings

HASTINGS — Two men were charged with reckless endangerment Friday after state police say the two fired a shotgun at a party they crashed.

State police in Fulton charged Ralph E. Bogan, 43, of Box 183, county Route 19, Williamstown, and Christopher L. McCarthy, 21, of 747 county Route 35, Fulton, with felony reckless endangerment.

Police said Bogan and McCarthy crashed a party at a home on county Route 4 in Hastings after midnight Thursday and were asked to leave.

They left, then returned with a .12-gauge shotgun and fired it from their vehicle in the direction of the garage where the party was held, police said.

Witnesses told police the men fired the gun three times, and police said two cars were hit with birdshot. Troopers said guests blocked Bogan and McCarthy's car from leaving until police arrived.

Both men were arraigned Friday and are being held in the Oswego County jail Saturday in lieu of \$1,000 bail.

— Janet Gramza

2 holiday fireworks shows planned today in region

If you haven't seen fireworks yet this weekend, there's still time. There are two places in and around Oswego County offering shows tonight.

■ **Sylvan and Verona beaches:** Fireworks display over Oneida Lake sponsored by Sylvan-Verona Beach Resort Association. Free. Fireworks begin at 9:30 p.m.

■ **Oswego:** The celebration continues at Bonney Fieldhouse with a 1 p.m. parade and fireworks at dusk.

Child-care sites receive \$15,100 grant from state

Two local child-care sites will receive a \$15,100 state grant to improve their existing facilities.

The money will go to the Children's Centers of Oswego County, with the program's Mitchell Street site getting \$10,000 and the remaining \$5,100 grant going to a site at the State University College at Oswego.

The state program will create additional slots for infants, preschoolers and school-aged children and help day-care centers improve their services.

— Mary Jo Hill

HERALD AMERICAN

regional

Cortland/Tompkins

'Today' show's Roker to receive SUNY Oswego alumni award



"TODAY" SHOW weatherman Al Roker majored in broadcasting at the State University College at Oswego. He also worked in a dining hall and at the campus radio station.

► Four others also will be honored at reunion this month.

By Janet Gramza
Staff Writer

OSWEGO — "Today" show weatherman Al Roker will attend this year's State University College at Oswego Alumni Reunion July 19 to receive the college's Distinguished Alumnus Award.

Roker, a member of Oswego's Class of 1976, took over for the nation's most famous weatherman, Willard Scott, when Scott retired from the NBC "Today" show last year.

Roker also is host of a news quiz show, operates a production company and has won two Emmy awards.

As a broadcasting major in college, Roker worked in a dining hall and the campus radio station to help pay for his education. He worked at WTVH-TV (Channel 5) in Syracuse from his sophomore year until shortly after his graduation.

"I was driving about 75 miles round trip every day and begging professors, 'Please, please, we were on late last night,'" he told The Syracuse Newspapers in 1995.

Roker will be among five recipients of alumni awards at the college reunion, which runs July 18 to 20.

ESPN sportscaster Steve Levy, Class of 1987, will receive SUNY Oswego's first Gold Award for an outstanding graduate of the last decade. Since 1993, Levy has anchored SportsCenter for ESPN and been an intermission host on National Hockey Night. Since 1995

he has done play-by-play for select National Hockey League games on ESPN2. He also is a co-host of the NFL on ESPN Radio. He has also served as a mentor for the Oswego Alumni Association's Alumni Scholarship.

Three alumni will get Anniversary Class Awards. They are:

■ **Dr. Douglas Halliday** of Syracuse, Class of 1972, a facial plastic and reconstructive surgeon.

■ **Robert A. Rubinstein**, Class of 1972, director of Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs Program on Analysis and Resolution of Conflicts.

■ **Carole Levin Schuster**, Class of 1952, a retired teacher of hospital-confined children in New York City.

Bill offers hope to people with rare digestive disorder

► Scriba family fought for insurance coverage for son's special food.

By Janet Gramza
Staff Writer

SCRIBA — Margaret and Robert Henderson got an early Christmas present in 1992, when their son, Eric, was born Dec. 16.

Nine days later, their joy turned to fear. A newborn screening test showed the baby had a rare disorder that made him unable to digest phenylalanine, an amino acid present in almost all foods.

Doctors told the Hendersons they had to feed Eric a special formula to prevent toxic levels of phenylalanine from damaging his brain.

They learned his condition, called PKU, could be treated with a diet consisting only of phenylalanine-free formula, fruit, vegetables and specially modified low-protein food.

Their health insurance didn't cover the expense. The Hendersons had to battle their insurance company for six months to get partial coverage, and they are still in debt to their pharmacy for Eric's formula.

They are among some 460 families in the state whose plight recently led the state legislature to pass a bill that would require insurance companies to subsidize special food supplements for people with rare digestive disorders.

The bill would expand a 1992 law requiring prescription plans to pay for life-sustaining formulas and would extend coverage to more people. It also would require insurance companies to pay up to \$2,500 a year for low-protein food products. Gov. George Pataki is expected to sign the bill into law this week.

"It's about time they made this law, because this food is medically necessary for kids with this disease," said Margaret Henderson, who helped lobby for the measure.

Although the new legislation is expected to help the vast majority of PKU victims, it might not apply to the Hendersons. Because Robert Henderson's prescription plan is paid for by his union, it is probably exempt from the law, Margaret Henderson said. He is an electrician at the State University College at

Oswego. "Even though the law might not apply to us, I lobbied for it to have a better future for any child with PKU," Margaret Henderson said. "And now that we've come this far, hopefully, we'll get a law passed that we are covered under."

Henderson said it might seem strange to force insurance companies to pay for low-protein spaghetti and bread, but to people with PKU, food is their only medicine. And the special food is expensive, running about \$600 a month for formula and about \$2,500 a year for modified food products.

According to the Children's PKU Network, about 466 people in the state are diagnosed with PKU, which stands for phenylketonuria. Children born with PKU are normal at birth, but over time a normal diet would damage their brains to the point of severe mental retardation, Margaret Henderson said.

After the results of Eric's test came in, the Hendersons had to wait through Christmas weekend to travel to Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester to get his formula.

Doctors told her to feed him regular formula, but as little as possible, until then. "I felt I was poisoning my son for the weekend," Margaret said.

With help from a lawyer and Eric's doctors, the Hendersons fought to convince the insurance company to pay 80 percent of the cost of the formula — not through a prescription plan, but through major medical.

When it came time to start Eric on solid food, the insurance company refused, Margaret Henderson said.

The Hendersons are now getting aid for Eric's food from a social services program, the Physically Handicapped Children's program, which will end when Eric turns 18 or his parents' income grows enough to disqualify them. That has squelched Margaret Henderson's plan to get a job once Eric goes to kindergarten.

Alisa Colatarci, an aide for state Sen. George D. Maziarz of Tonawanda, the key sponsor of the bill, said it was meant to cover anyone with a prescription plan. She plans to investigate the Hendersons' situation this week to make sure their insurer is interpreting the law correctly.

■ MODIFIED, Page B2



MARGARET HENDERSON of Scriba holds her 3½-year-old son, Eric, who has a rare disorder that makes him unable to digest phenylalanine, an amino acid present in almost all foods. The disease restricts his diet.

STEPHEN D. CANNARIELLO/Staff photographer

President's exit raises questions about Oswego fair's future

► Jerry Thomas is credited for bringing new life to the Oswego County Fair.

By Janet Gramza
Staff Writer

SANDY CREEK — Never mind the lion tamer, the fireworks or the new rides on the midway. One of the most talked-about sights at the 1997 Oswego County Fair was a name tag pinned on fair President Jerry Thomas's barrel chest.

After 16 years as leading man at the fair, Thomas didn't need to state his name. Instead, his tag read, "Don't ask. It's my last year."

Lots of people were asking anyway, all the way up until the fair ended Saturday. "I've gotten a lot of stunned reaction," Thomas said. "People saying, 'What? You've got to be kidding me.'"

Thomas isn't kidding. Not only is he stepping down as fair president, but he's also taking a few key people with him, including his most loyal teammate, his wife: fair Vice President Maryhelen Thomas.

"There's a time to come, a time to go," Thomas said. "It's time."



KATHARINE CICCARELLO/Contributing photographer

His reasons include his health and his family. Thomas figures he's put about 800 hours a year into the fair. Starting around April, fair preparations occupy every evening and weekend for three months.

Two days after last year's fair, Thomas collapsed with chest pains and fluid in his lungs. He had open-heart surgery to have an aortic valve replaced.

"I think the guy above let me come back and run this fair one more year, and then enjoy myself and my family," he said.

He also recently resigned his job as superintendent of buildings and grounds at the Oswego County Public Safety Center to take the same position for the Sandy Creek School District. He starts his new job Tuesday.

"When I do something, I give it 100 percent, and I want to do what's expected of me for the school district and maybe a little more," he said. "So I'll need a year or two to get my ducks in order there."

Maryhelen, who has driven a Sandy Creek school bus for 24 years, said she's leaving for the same reason she embraced the fair

when her husband took over in 1981.

"I'm just behind him," she said. "If I stayed, once he saw me here working, he'd want to get back in, so I think it's better if we both go at the same time."

\$24,000 in debt

Their leaving has raised many questions about the future of the fair. Folks have grown accustomed to viewing it as Jerry's baby. After all, it was near death when a group of concerned citizens asked him to become president in 1980.

By then, the fair was \$24,000 in debt, the fairgrounds and buildings were in disrepair, attendance had plummeted to under 3,000 and no self-respecting vendor or entertainer wanted to return.

"The fair was at the point where it either had to close or start over," said Sybil Cummins, assistant junior fair superintendent. "Jerry came in with new ideas, and he brought it back from the bottom."

Thomas loves to tell how much he didn't want to take over the fair. Then a friend in the Lacona Volunteer Fire Department remarked that there was no way

■ FAIR, Page B2