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The SUNDAY Journal Star

SUNDAY ♦ AUGUST 11, 2013 ♦ \$3.00

LOUD AND PROUD



MOTORCYCLISTS DESCEND ON RIVERFRONT FOR GRAND NATIONALS WEEKEND. B1, D1

Friends step in after tragedy

Just more than a year ago, the smiley family of Ed McAbee and Sally Gunterman thrived amid singsong joy and a promising future.

Then fate punched in with repeated, stunning brutality. Early last August, McAbee, 36, died in a motorcycle wreck. In

late December, his longtime partner Gunterman, 34, died in a driving accident. Less than a month later, her mother, Karen Seaton of Peoria Heights, died while mourning over photos of the late couple.

Six months. Three deaths. Unmeasurable grief. "It was horrible," says Gunterman's best friend, Jessica Wagner, 35, of Metamora. "It's something that you just can't imagine happening."

Left behind are three children struggling to deal with shocking loss. Meanwhile, though still pained themselves, the couple's family and friends hope a fundraiser next weekend will help brighten the youngsters' futures.

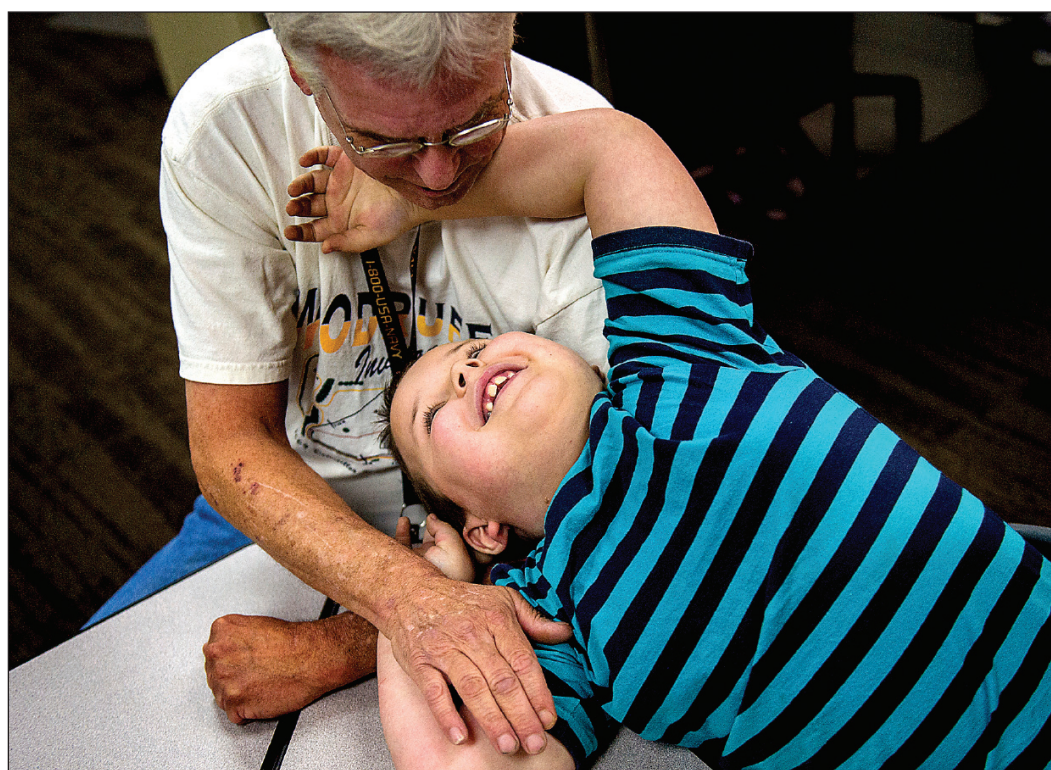
"People love them and will do anything for them," Wagner says.

◆◆◆
In 1999, Ed McAbee took a ride that changed his life, along with many others.

Just a few years out of East Peoria Community High School, Ed was forging a career as a self-employed carpenter. The 23-year-old was living in a rental home outside Lowpoint with several friends.

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Path to learning



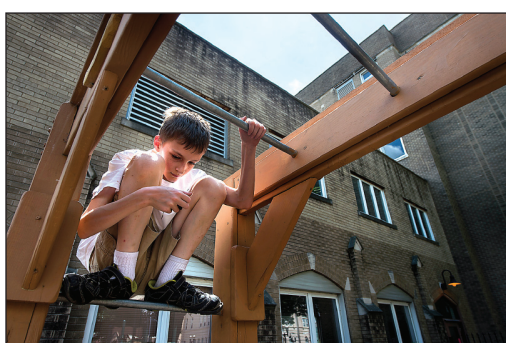
ABOVE: After a sensory session, autistic student Camden, 8, embraces teacher Jim Butler. Students at the Academy for Autism advance their academic and social skills using programming based on behavior analysis methods. BELOW: Luke, 14, who is non-verbal, enjoys climbing on the playground equipment throughout the play time.

New school helps central Illinois children with autism

Luke, 14, of Morton stopped talking three years ago. That means he can't, or won't, explain why he first gestures toward a wrong answer when his teachers at the Academy for Autism ask him a question before he gestures toward the right answer.

Every single question. Every single time.

"That's autism," said Lindsey Cox, Luke's teacher at the academy, and the person who discovered his consistently quirky mental acrobatics. "Always a mystery."



Staff and administrators are working toward unlocking some of those mysteries at the Academy for Autism, the home of a new educational experience for children with autism that opened in June in the Academy Campus of Children's Home on Northeast Madison Avenue in Peoria.

It's a first-of-its-kind school for children with autism in the area. There are currently two classrooms in operation: one with two students, a teacher and a teacher's aide, the other

Please see **SCHOOL**, Page A7

Story by **SCOTT HILYARD** / Photographs by **FRED ZWICKY** / of the Journal Star

Cities forge lasting bonds

Program between Peoria, Friedrichshafen goes beyond cultural exchange

BY **NICK VLAHOS**
OF THE JOURNAL STAR

Those who doubt the impact of sister-city programs should consider Karin Seckinger.

More accurately, perhaps, they should consider her photograph album.

The album is more than 30 years old. But the contents still speak to Seckinger, who is from Friedrichshafen, Germany.

They also speak to the influence Peoria has had on lives more than 4,500 miles from its Illinois River banks.

In 1976, Friedrichshafen and Peoria became sister cities. Five years later, the 18-year-old Seckinger decided to join other Friedrichshafen teenagers on a youth-exchange visit to Peoria.

"I read an article in the newspaper that there was a student exchange, and I thought, 'Well, this would be a nice idea — to get away from my parents,'" Seckinger said with a laugh.

It appears Seckinger found more on that trip than just freedom from her folks.

Seckinger spoke with a visitor from Peoria one night last month at a restaurant that overlooks the shore of Lake Constance, which separates Friedrichshafen from Austria

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