



Rainy day portrait

staff photo by Peter Rocha

Drops of rain were evident everywhere following the thundershowers late Monday night. With the rains came a breath

of unseasonably cool air — a relief from the hot summer weather.

Superman myth lives in the real Metropolis

United Press International METROPOLIS, Ill. — Bob Westerfield says he still believes in Superman, despite a dose of economic kryptonite that dashed hopes of a multimillion dollar theme park in the "Man of Steel's" hometown a decade ago.

"He's as real as God made little green apples," said Westerfield, a self-described promoter who talks faster than a speeding bullet.

"I have seen him take adults and make kids out of them. I've seen him with the mentally retarded and become their hero. I've seen the eyes of kids widen after they see someone who can fly and who can't be hurt by things," Westerfield said. "He must be alive."

The vision of turning Metropolis, a city of 7,000 perched on rolling hills along the Ohio River, into a major tourist attraction was very much alive in the early 1970s.

— the only town bearing that name in the U.S. Postal Service's directory — officially adopted Superman as a resident.

The Rev. Charles Chandler, a Baptist minister, donned the caped costume and performed several stunts before national newspaper, television and radio reporters.

"We got excited about that and said, 'Well, what else can we do?'" said Clyde Wills, editor of the weekly Metropolis Planet.

In 1973, a corporation made up mainly of residents purchased \$250,000 worth of stock to create a venture called "The Amazing World of Superman." They began planning a museum, shopping complex and theme park.

They paid \$50,000 for the use of Superman's name and, in the summer of 1973, a museum was opened in a converted skating rink.

Three months later, the corporation ran out of money, the

museum closed and its contents were put up for auction.

"Things just pretty much died after that," Wills said. "Everybody was upset about losing the money they invested, and Superman was just pretty much a dirty word around here for several years."

Wills said most of the bitterness about the failed venture among the townspeople has died. Superman still adorns signs leading into and out of town and on the city's water tower. There is a big "S" outside the Planet office, the chamber of commerce has a talking Superman telephone booth, and there is an annual "Superman Celebration" on the second weekend of June.

Youngest blackbelt ever

Boy wins cancer fight

United Press International SCOTT DEPOT, W.Va. — Matt Hodges, who six years ago became the youngest karate blackbelt in the world, appears to be the winner over an even more difficult challenger — cancer.

At the age of 6, he was in the Guinness Book of World Records and appeared on the "Mike Douglas Show" and "To Tell the Truth". The "Karate King" had fans around the globe who sent him letters — more than 20,000 of them — filled with praise and affection.

Little Matt Hodges was a star, especially in his neighborhood. Matt's future looked bright.

But all that came to an abrupt halt on April 2, 1977.

During the day, Matt competed in a Marshall University karate tournament. That night, he lay on his back in the Charleston General Hospital, using all his strength and concentration against a cancerous brain tumor. "My little boy lay motionless

like a human vegetable with tubes running out of his head, his mouth and nose. His eyes were popping out of his head which was three times its normal size," Pam Hodges, his mother, said.

The doctors acted quickly to drain the fluids expanding Matt's brain. But the release of pressure caused a mass of blood clots. Matt was in bad shape.

He made it through the five operations needed to extract the blood clots.

"They were as big as baseballs, but I made it," said Matt, 12.

After recovering from the resulting paralysis and loss of speech, he underwent yet another operation to remove the tumor.

When the tumor was removed, doctors gave him a year to live and told his mother to expect the tumor to grow back. That was six years ago, but the tumor has not returned.

Matt's most recent checkup showed no trace of cancer. He is

not on medication and no longer needs chemotherapy or radiation treatments.

His hair has grown back. His memory has greatly improved, and his feet have grown four shoe sizes in the past seven months, after having not grown at all for four years.

"I'm very lucky," he says. "You've got to have courage." Courage is only one of the qualities Matt possesses.

"Matt has never been depressed or sad throughout all this, he is always happy. It never seemed to faze him," said his mother.

Matt's doctors said he should swim every day to combat the degeneration of his muscles caused by the temporary paralysis. Unable to afford a pool for her son, Ms. Hodges, bought him a pony.

Ms. Hodges says overcoming the ignorance of his peers and the prejudice of society is be-

coming a bigger challenge as Matt grows older.

For now, Matt's cousin, Michael, 10, and sister, Chastity, 9, take care of any bullies, his mother said. But one day Matt will have to face it alone. And when that day comes, his mother believes he will be ready.

"I believe one day Matt will be completely well," she said. "When he gets older he will take it upon himself to build his body back up. I told the doctors that when he first became sick. They thought I was in a fantasy world."

The "Bionic Kid," as Matt became known to his doctors, is very busy these days. He goes bowling every weekend with his classmates from Winfield Elementary Special Education School, and he is learning to ride "Red", his new pony.

"I'll always try something once," he said.

Texas flag stays popular

United Press International DALLAS — Texans use the Lone Star state flag to stir martinis, hawk real estate and top oil derricks and skyscrapers. They even fly them on Cadillacs.

"If it's not there you get a naked feeling," says businessman Lou Kronberg.

Flag makers and promoters say no other state has such a fixation on its most visible symbol.

"You can't go down the street without seeing the flag," businessman Lou Kronberg said of the flag.

Other state flags are an "impossible complex of scales

or figures of justice," said Kronberg, owner of Flags and Flagpoles, a firm stocking one of the nation's largest flag inventories. But the Texas flag "is a very powerful graphic design in strong colors."

He said he sells customers tiny flags for martini glasses

and 30-foot-by-50 flags, which can cover a house and must be displayed from 100-foot poles.

He said he shipped a container load of flags to Norway last year for a western-style celebration and regularly sends items to fashionable

Paris boutiques.

"You must remember that Texas was a republic," said Jay Moore, general manager of San Antonio's American Flag Sales Center. "The flag carries a specific meaning for many people, a sense of history and independence."

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