

# HANNIBAL COURIER~POST

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NORTHEAST MISSOURI

## The fight of his short life

Story by Eric Dundon | Courier-Post Editor

Most one-month-old babies can lift their heads briefly, bring their hands to their faces and respond in some way to loud noises.

They cry.  
And cry.  
And scream.  
And cry some more.

The first month of life is one full of bonding for parents and their children.

That's not the case yet for Judson Stewart and his parents, Jason Stewart and Laura Williams, of Monroe City.

His parents haven't heard him cry. They haven't held him.

Born with congenital diaphragmatic hernia (CDH), Judson is in the fight of his life just one month after birth.

With most of his time on Earth on life support, Judson is the sickest baby at St. Louis Children's Hospital. This story, though, is one of fortitude — of Judson's tiny willpower to battle a deadly birth defect, and of his parents' reliance on their faith and community to get through what could break down emotionally even the strongest person.

As his dad Jason said, "He's a miracle, definitely. He has baffled doctors and defied all the odds."



Judson Stewart, son of Jason Stewart and Laura Williams on Monroe City, was born with congenital diaphragmatic hernia. He was on life support much of his first month of life, but continues to battle despite the odds. CONTRIBUTED/JASON STEWART AND LAURA WILLIAMS

SEE JUDSON, A11

### TWAIN SAYS

You ought never to "sass" old people— unless they "sass" you first.

- Advice for Good Little Girls



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### THIS DAY

**March 5, 1770:**  
The Boston Massacre occurs as five Americans are fatally shot by British troops in an event that would contribute to the outbreak of the American Revolutionary War five years later.

### GREETINGS

To Tammy Nichols, a valued subscriber from Hannibal.

### OBITUARIES

• Jeri Tourney

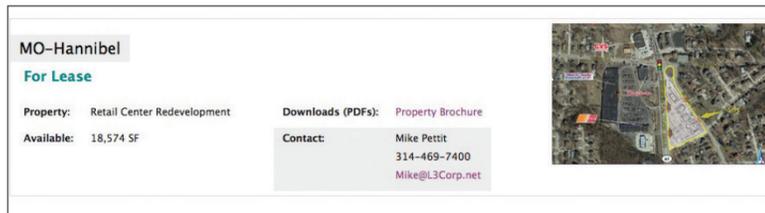
### INDEX

Weather A2  
Nation/World A2  
Local A3  
Opinion A4  
Deaths A5  
Lutheran School A6  
Comics A8  
Sports A9  
Our Area B1  
Your Life B2  
Classifieds B3  
Faith B6  
Health B8



HANNIBAL

## Marketing of St. Mary's development continues



This screenshot from L3's website notes the the area for lease on between U.S. 61 and St. Mary's Ave. in "Hannibal."

A traffic study has not yet taken place at the location

DANNY HENLEY  
Courier-Post Reporter

The marketing of a planned 15,790 square foot retail development on St. Mary's Avenue in Hannibal continues.

During the February meeting of the Northeast Missouri Economic Development Council, George Walley, executive director of the group, reported that the project is moving forward. He noted that a sign has gone up at the 3405-3441 St. Mary's Ave. site, directing people interested in leasing space in the buildings to contact L3 Corporation.

"L3 is actively marketing the site and their website is showing two food businesses on the site as 'contract pending,'" wrote Walley in his report last month.

A check of L3's website this week revealed the end buildings in the

three-structure development were still classified as having a "deal pending."

Space was listed as available for the three-shop middle building. According to the website, the northern most shop in the central building will offer 3,500 square feet of space. The center unit will be the smallest shop with 2,400 square feet. The southern shop will offer 3,000 square feet.

The site plan posted at www.l3corp.net indicates two "curb cuts" providing access are proposed on both McMaster's Avenue and St. Mary's Avenue.

At last report, a traffic study in the area had not been undertaken. Walley advised Northeast Missouri Economic Development Council members that Cedarwood Development was holding off on commissioning the study until it had received signed contracts, rather than letters of intent, regarding the northern and southern buildings.

SEE DEVELOPMENT, A11

HANNIBAL

## BPW following charter, GM says

DANNY HENLEY  
Courier-Post Reporter

Has the Hannibal City Council lost "control" of the Board of Public Works? That question prompted Mayor Roy Hark to seek a response during Tuesday night's City Council meeting at City Hall.

The question was asked by Hannibal resident David Klassen, treasurer of the Mark Twain Federated Democratic Club. A member of the organization, O.C. Latta, had requested

time before the Council to offer comment in behalf of the organization regarding the Grain Belt Express transmission project, the controversial plan that Clean Line Energy (CLE) is proposing that would see a high voltage DC transmission line built to carry wind-generated energy from western Kansas into Missouri, Illinois and Indiana. With Latta out of town Tuesday on a family matter, Klassen "pinch hit"

SEE BPW, A11

HANNIBAL

## Neighbors displeased with handicap sign

DANNY HENLEY  
Courier-Post Reporter

An ongoing neighborhood dispute over the placement of a "loading and unloading" sign in front of a residence on Magnolia Avenue is about to again go before the

Hannibal Traffic Committee (HTC), which ruled last month the sign at 230 Magnolia could remain. An appeal of that decision will be heard during a 2 p.m. meeting Monday, March 7, in council chamber.

SEE SIGN, A11

### Hannibal Regional ORTHOPEDICS

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# (NEWS)

## JUDSON

Continued from Page A1

### Judson's beginning

Jason, a fuel tank driver out of Canton, and Laura, a para-professional with the Monroe City R-II School District, found out they were having a child on June 15, 2015.

Three months later, on Sept. 15, 2015, they received a twin set of news: their child was a boy and he had CDH — a birth defect that affects 1 in 2,500 babies.

CDH occurs when the diaphragm of a fetus develops abnormally. The malformation allows organs in the abdomen (i.e. intestine, stomach, liver) to travel into the chest cavity, seriously impeding the growth of the lungs and heart.

Half of the babies diagnosed with CDH will die. In the U.S., 800 babies will lose their battle with CDH this year.

On the day of diagnosis, the couple remembered not even hearing of CDH before.

"It affects so many babies each year, but no one really knows about it," Jason said.

After learning of their son's condition, Jason and Laura traveled to St. Louis about every three weeks to monitor their baby's growth. Hannibal OBGYN Dr. Laura Maple co-managed Laura along with the fetal care center at Barnes-Jewish Hospital to monitor the severity his condition.

On Jan. 30, Laura gave birth to baby Judson.

### Judson's first hours

Laura never got to hold her newborn. Immediately in danger, delivery room staff intubated Judson and whisked him off to the neonatal intensive-care unit (NICU). Soon after, Laura and Jason discovered the fighting spirit of their son.

He lasted about four hours on his own before doctors decided he wouldn't make it through the night without life support. That first night was a true test for the couple. They weren't sure if their son would make it through the night. But the morning came, and Judson was still fighting.

By the time of his birth, Judson's lungs hadn't fully developed. In fact, they were remarkably underdeveloped.

Due to CDH, his right lung had developed to about 85 percent of what's considered normal. Worse, his left lung was one-third of the size of his undersized right lung. Thirty-two days later, his vital organs can't keep up with demand.

"His heart and lungs aren't strong enough just yet to live on his own," Jason said. "He can accept the oxygen, but his body is having an extremely hard time of letting go of the carbon dioxide in the exhale."

### Judson's first month

Judson is day-to-day, Jason said.

But each day that passes, Jason and Laura see new signs of resilience in their son. To date, he's had six surgeries, four procedures and — at last count — 66 blood transfusions.

While most parents start to get a sense of the personality of their child, Judson has been connected to machines keeping him alive. On day one of Judson's life, doctors connected him to an ECMO (Extracorporeal Membrane Oxygenation) machine. The ECMO machine acted as Judson's heart and lungs.

While ECMO essentially kept Judson alive, the use of a machine for more than a month on a CDH is unheard of. ECMO was simultaneously helping and harming.

Notorious for causing brain bleeds in infants, Judson needed to get strong enough to live without ECMO.

"We're in a race against time to get him of ECMO," Jason said on Wednesday, March 2, from a conference room of St. Louis Children's hospital.

Doctors performed multiple "clamp tests," where doctors clamped the ECMO tubes to see if Judson could survive on his own. Each time, he failed, as the clock ticked to get him off the life support device. Doctors switched him from a ventilator to an oscillator.

### Judson's breakthrough

With 32 days on ECMO, a

supposed record for St. Louis Children's Hospital, doctors tried a "clamp test" again on Thursday, March 3.

Jason said 20 doctors, nurses and hospital staff gathered around Judson to see if his body had gotten strong enough. Dr. Kathryn Bernabe, Judson's pediatric surgeon, return with papers showing if Judson succeeded.

If the group huddled in Judson's room could have burst into applause, Jason said, they would have. Judson passed, and was taken off of ECMO around 1 p.m. March 3.

"She had that paper in her hand, and it was like she was holding the golden ticket to get into the Willy Wonka factory," Jason said. "We knew he had passed."

Judson entered surgery Friday afternoon, March 4, to remove the ECMO tubes in his neck. He remains on an oscillator to help him breathe, but this week's developments are another step on an improbable road to recovery. Doctors will now work to strengthen his lungs to eventually take him off the oscillator.

### Judson's support

Seeing their son strapped to machines each day has been unspcakably difficult, Laura said.

"We've hit the highest of highs and in the same minute the lowest of lows," she explained.

Jason added that while most parents get to know their children in the first month, he and Laura have had to latch on to the littlest of things.

"He is a daddy's boy," Jason said proudly. "He gets excited when his parents come in the room. The heart monitor will go from 120 to 160 and higher."

But while those little moments bring joy to Jason and Laura, a month with a sedated and struggling baby has had an enormous effect. Jason credits his faith and the Northeast Missouri community for helping the couple cope.

"Our faith is the only thing that has gotten us through this. God above. He deserves all the credit," he said. "That's what we believe."

Having the sickest child in the



Jason Stewart and Laura Williams, of Monroe City, smile with their son Judson. Although Judson has been sedated most of his life, they still find time to cherish family moments. CONTRIBUTED/JASON STEWART AND LAURA WILLIAMS

hospital has united the Monroe City community. Jason said old feuds have been settled to unite in support of Judson.

"It might sound weird to see this little baby, but he is such a blessing. God has used him as such a blessing. To know that your son's story is bringing people together and doing good in just 32 days, that's a blessing from above," Jason said.

"For those who believe in a certain faith, it's brought them closer to God. For those who don't believe in a certain faith, it's made them want to be a better person," he added.

Some have given monetarily, others have lifted the family up in prayer. Beyond Monroe City, the couple said they have connected with other families who have a child with CDH.

Families in Hannibal and Palmyra have connected with Laura and Jason. Some of the people they've met have children overcame rough beginnings. Some couples have lost a child.

"They all have different levels of severity and different stories," Laura said.

### Judson's future

Despite Judson's amazing progress, he faces a long road ahead.

"We expect to watch Fourth of July fireworks from his hospital room," Jason said.

Jason and Laura qualified for the Ronald McDonald House and are just minutes away if they are needed at the hospital. No matter how difficult a path the journey may take, Laura and Jason say they won't give up.

"If there's one thing I take from all of this, it's don't give up. Never, ever give up. If he's not giving up, I'm not giving up. Just keep putting one foot in front of the other. Him going through this makes me think again what I complain about. That would be my biggest message to everyone," Jason said.

The couple encourages everyone to educate themselves about CDH. There's no known cause of CDH and mortality rates hover around 50 percent.

So far, Judson has beaten every odd. The "little knucklehead" — as Jason lovingly called him — continues to push back in the fight of his young life.

As Jason said, "We are in the midst of our miracle."

Follow Judson's story by searching for "Just Breathe Baby Stewart" on Facebook. Reach editor Eric Dundon at [eric.dundon@courierpost.com](mailto:eric.dundon@courierpost.com).

## DEVELOPMENT

Continued from Page A1

A visit to L3's website reveals a couple of typos of note. Under the "list-

ings" heading the name of America's Hometown is spelled "Hannibel." Also listed incorrectly is County Market, which is referred to as Town and Country Groceries on the lineup of

retailers that are located in the immediate area of the development.

On a vote of 7-0, a request to rezone the site from District A-One & Two Family to District

D-Highway was approved by the City Council at its Jan. 19 meeting.

The proposal had successfully received a first reading from the Council at its Jan. 5 meeting, fol-

lowing an hour-plus public hearing on the topic.

The latest rezoning request went before the Council with the endorsement of the Planning & Zoning Commission. On

Dec. 17, 2015, the commission voted 4-0 in support of the request.

Reach reporter Danny Henley at [danny.henley@courierpost.com](mailto:danny.henley@courierpost.com)

## SIGN

Continued from Page A1

bers at City Hall.

The sign has been a regular topic of consideration on the Traffic Committee's agenda since the sign was installed a few months ago.

At the HTC's Jan. 14 meeting, Aaron Dillman, who reportedly lives adjacent to 230 Magnolia, alleged that the family living in the house where the sign is located is not using it as intended — to assist in the safe loading and un-

loading of a handicapped youngster. He complained the parking spot on the congested street is frequently being utilized by friends and family members of people residing at 230 Magnolia.

Dillman stated that since the sign was installed the family has had a handicap ramp built that starts at the driveway on the side of the house and extends to the residence's back door. He asserted the ramp makes it possible to wheel the handicapped youngster in and out of the house without encountering any steps.

Dillman said he assumed the sign was installed to make it easier for a school bus to pick up and drop off the youngster, yet he reported never seeing a bus provide transportation for the child.

HTC members agreed to have a letter sent to Kalissa Powell, who resides at 230 Magnolia, asking her to provide bus transportation records to help justify the need for the sign at the location.

Powell appeared at the HTC's Feb. 25 meeting to explain why the sign is necessary. She provided pho-

tographic evidence to help illustrate that while there is a ramp, it was constructed in such a way that size-wise it is not possible to unload her daughter from a vehicle in the driveway.

Powell added that because the vehicle which picks her daughter up every morning doesn't fit in the driveway, she carries her daughter down the driveway to load her in the vehicle which then transports her to school. Powell assured the committee members that the area left open by the loading and unloading sign is utilized

each week day during the school year.

After HTC member Rich Dauma commented that the "needs of a handicapped youngster take precedence," committee members voted to leave the sign in place.

Dillman, armed with a petition with seven signatures, is appealing the HTC's Feb. 25 decision. In a letter submitted at City Hall, Dillman contends that it is possible for Powell to utilize the ramp, rather than carry her daughter down 11 steps to the street level. Dillman added that

as the youngster grows, carrying her will only become an "even more unsafe" task for Powell and the child.

Dillman's letter requests that both Mayor Roy Hark and City Manager Jeff LaGarce be in attendance at Monday's meeting.

Pending the outcome of Monday's Traffic Committee meeting, the dispute could ultimately wind up in the hands of the City Council.

Reach reporter Danny Henley at [danny.henley@courierpost.com](mailto:danny.henley@courierpost.com)

## BPW

Continued from Page A1

before the Council.

Klassen attributed the following question to Latta: How has the Board of Public Works evolved to become so out of the control of the City Council?

To answer the question, Hark turned to Bob Stevenson, general manager of the BPW, who was seated in the audience next to the BPW Board's newest member, Todd Kendall.

"I think Board is perfectly in line with the charter," he said, detailing the information the BPW regularly brings to the Council, much of which is not even mandated by the City Charter to provide. "I'm a little bit puzzled what else we could do to (be in Charter compliance)." City Manager Jeff

LaGarce said there are common misconceptions regarding the authority the Council has over the BPW Board.

"A lot of people don't understand the city and Board are under the same organization's umbrella, but legally they are separate in their autonomy and authority. It's been that way for years," he said. "Once (BPW Board members are) appointed they operate autonomously. We don't approve or review their (BPW) budget."

The other assertion during Klassen's approximately 9-minute commentary that prompted a response was that the BPW lacks Charter authority to hire outside legal counsel.

James Lemon, who serves as attorney for both the city and BPW, noted that nothing in the Char-

ter prohibits the BPW or city from hiring "an attorney for some special representation."

"That has never been the custom in this city," said the attorney. "Anytime there has been the need for specialized legal counsel it has always been done."

Many of Klassen's talking points regarding the wind-energy project were familiar. He noted that the tall poles would be an unsightly addition to the landscape of Ralls County. Klassen suggested that along the power line's corridor there would be restrictions on farming directly under or near the lines. Klassen pointed out that CLE does not actually own any of the energy that is being offered for sale. Citing the BPW's possible interest in buying a share in the power sub-

station that would be built in Ralls County, Klassen said the Missouri Constitution prohibits any unit of government, such as the BPW, from purchasing a portion of a private company, such as CLE.

When Klassen began to turn to a new topic — chloramines — he was interrupted by Mayor Pro Tem Kevin Knickerbocker, who noted that comments regarding the disinfection of the city's water supply was not on the Council's agenda for consideration. A motion that Klassen return to the scheduled topic was approved by his fellow councilmen.

Before wrapping up, Klassen posed one other question: Why are there some elected members of the Council supporting the actions of the (BPW) Board, which are in fact angering many of their

own constituents? There was no reply.

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