

The Paducah Sun

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ELLEN O'NAN | The Sun

(From left to right) McKayla Emery, Jack and Linda Dowdy, and McKynzie Emery laugh together inside their home in Hickory on Friday afternoon.

'Grandfamilies' becoming more commonplace

BY GENEVIEVE POSTLETHWAIT

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Linda and Jackie Dowdy's daughters left the nest years ago, but their home is far from empty.

Their 16- and 14-year old granddaughters McKynzie and McKayla keep their Mayfield home full of life, day in and day out. They call Linda "Granny" and Jackie "Paw-paw," but they are their parents and have been since they were small.

"They're our kids," Linda said of 'Kynzie and 'Kayla. "Talk to anybody else that's raised their grandkids for that long. They're yours."

"Grandfamilies" is the term for households like the Dowdys.

Nationally about 3 percent of children live in grandfamilies (families headed by grandparents or relatives), according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The percentage of Kentucky children living with their grandparents is double the national average. Kentucky, Delaware, Louisiana



John Paul Henry | The Sun

Jean Hester of Almo, Ky. picks up her granddaughter, Isabella Hester-Earles, 3, on Saturday while caring for her five grandchildren at her home. The percentage of children living with grandparents in Kentucky is double the national average. Tyler Earles, 5, (left) busies himself with a toy car.

and West Virginia have the highest rate of children in grandfamilies at 6 percent.

In the Purchase, it is estimated that 1,988 grandparents are the primary caregivers for their grandchildren, according to census data.

It's a family of families that's grown significantly in the last decade due in part to economic stresses, as well as improvements in the ways the U.S. Census captures family data.

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Concealed carry gaining favor in region

BY DAVID ZOELLER

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Changing laws and changing times continue to spike interest in obtaining permits to carry concealed weapons, according to area law enforcement officials.

And that interest has carried over to businesses offering training, weapons and accessories.

While Kentucky has allowed its residents to carry concealed weapons since 1996, concealed-carry has only been legal in Illinois for a year and a half. Interest in both states has surged in recent months, especially among women.

"We (Illinois) were the 50th state to enact concealed-carry," said Metropolis Police Chief Harry Masse.

According to the Illinois State Police, 91,000 concealed-carry permits have been issued in Illinois since the law went into effect July 9, 2013. But "southern Illinois probably has more concealed-carry permits, per ratio of population, than the entire state," said Masse.

According to the latest data from the Kentucky State Police, 59,530 conceal-carry permits were issued in Kentucky in 2013, and 303,455 permits have been issued since the law took effect in 1996.

Masse, like other law enforcement officials, supports the right of citizens to legally carry concealed weapons.

"It's a fact, before (concealed-carry laws) the only people carrying concealed weapons were bad guys and the po-

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Baptist Health marks 30 years since first open-heart surgery

BY LAUREL BLACK

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On Valentine's Day of 1985, Victor Evans found himself recovering from heartache of the most literal kind.

The 50-year-old fluorspar mining supervisor and Cave-In-Rock, Illinois, resident had undergone the first open-heart surgery in Paducah. Dr. Robin Howe performed the coronary bypass to treat Evans' two blocked arteries on Feb. 8 at what was then Western Baptist Hospital.

Evans had suffered a heart attack 3 1/2 years earlier, and when he began feeling badly again, his doctors decided he needed bypass surgery. He told The Sun after the procedure that he had no misgivings about



Howe

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GOP: Immigrants granted 'amnesty bonuses'

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Millions of immigrants benefiting from President Barack Obama's executive actions could get a windfall from the IRS, a reversal of fortune after years of paying taxes to help fund government programs they were banned from receiving.

Armed with new Social Security

numbers, many of these immigrants who were living in the U.S. illegally will now be able to claim up to four years' worth of tax credits designed to benefit the working poor. For big families, that's a maximum of nearly \$24,000, as long as they can document their earnings during those years.

Some Republicans are labeling the

payments "amnesty bonuses," one more reason they oppose Obama's program shielding millions of immigrants from deportation.

"I represent hard working, law-biding Texans," said Rep. Sam Johnson, a senior Republican on the House Ways and Means Committee.

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Romance rules at 'speed weddings'

BY LAUREL BLACK

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Sandy and Rebecca McDaniel had always dreamed of a big destination wedding in a far-flung locale, like Argentina or Spain.

But as the years of their engagement went by — five, to be exact — the dream stayed a dream. The couple set two dates for the wedding and watched them both go by.

"We just never got around to planning it or following through with it," Sandy McDaniel said. "Work always got in the way."

Then the McDaniels, who moved back to Sandy's hometown of Paducah from Las Vegas in October, saw an item in the newspaper for a speed wedding event Sat-

urday at the River Discovery Center.

The self-described museum nerds decided that a simple ceremony overlooking the Ohio River was right up their alley. They brought their 3 1/2 year old daughter, Daphne, and 21 family members from Paducah and Iowa to be part of their big day.

The McDaniels were the first of seven couples who opted for a short, sweet Valentine's Day wedding in the center's historic Founders Room. Large windows let in the afternoon light and offered a view of the river, while a vase full of red roses served as the sole added decoration in the room. The actual ceremony, officiated by

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JOHN PAUL HENRY | The Sun

Brecken Carneal (second to right) watches as her husband-to-be, Donald Carnine, says his vows on Saturday during their wedding at the River Discovery Center Founders Room in Paducah. Retired Circuit Judge Jeff Hines (left) performed the ceremony. Ethan Carneal, 10, (second to left) was the ring bearer for Carneal and Carnine.

NATION

WILL WAR POWER VOTES HAUNT '16?

In 2002, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton cast a vote in favor of the Iraq war that would later haunt her presidential campaign. Now a new crop of senators are facing a similar choice.

7A



WORLD

ACCUSATIONS FLY AFTER CEASE-FIRE

A cease-fire was declared in eastern Ukraine, kindling slim hopes of a reprieve from the violence, but within two hours, the warring sides were already trading fresh accusations.

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Forecast

Today

25°
COLD

Very cold.

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GRANDFAMILIES

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Grandfamilies form for a variety of reasons: parents' job loss, military deployment, divorce, death, domestic issues, substance abuse, incarceration and mental illness among them. When parents, for whatever reason, can no longer care for their children, grandparents, like Granny and Pawpaw Dowdy, take on a second round of parenting to keep their grandchildren out of foster care and in the family.

If the grandparents are willing and able, it's typically what's best for the children, and best for taxpayers, too. Generations United, a support organization, estimates that grandfamilies save taxpayers \$4 billion a year by raising grandchildren and keeping them out of foster care.

The Dowdys: The decision was 'simple'

Linda's oldest daughter, McKynzie and McKayla's mother, was "in a rough time" when McKynzie was born. Linda and Jackie, who were still raising two teenage girls of their own, watched McKynzie often when she was a baby, as grandparents often do. But their time with McKynzie became more frequent. For weeks at a time they'd keep McKynzie and care for her, not hearing or seeing much of their daughter, McKynzie's mother.

The Dowdys didn't know the exact details of their daughter's struggles, but they were worried for McKynzie's safety. Things escalated to the point where they enlisted the help of their family attorney and got temporary custody of McKynzie.

"What choice did I have?" Linda said. "After that it was just simple."

McKynzie's mother didn't fight it. When McKynzie was 16 months old, her grandparents gained full custody of her. About two years later, the same happened with her sister, McKayla.

Linda and Jackie consider themselves lucky that they were in a position to take in their granddaughters. Jackie works at a plant in Calvert City and has for nearly 20 years. Linda is in her 38th year at the Andy Gardner Foundation in Mayfield.

Still, their three-bedroom, one-bath home had to grow to accommodate the couple, their children, and their grandchildren. Jackie jokes that with five girls and only one bathroom in the house, expanding was his only chance at survival. Now, their home has five bedrooms, two bathrooms and plenty of room for them all.

To others they may look like an odd family — white parents with two biracial (grand)daughters. They used to get looks and stares everywhere they went together when the girls were little, although it's gotten better now, they said. At the time, Jackie just kept saying, "They had to be loved! We took 'em in, because they had to be loved. It doesn't matter what color our skin or their skin is."

The girls' mother lives in Louisville now and seems to be doing better, staying out of trouble, the Dowdys say. They visit her a few times a year, but the girls' home is with their grandparents and always will be.

"Years ago, if somebody started asking me about all this I would start crying, because my heart was broken," Linda admits. "My heart was broken for my daughter. My heart was broken for us, that we were

1,988

The estimated number of grandparents who are the primary caregivers for their grandchildren in the Purchase Area, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

If you are one of those 1,988 grandparents, you can call the Purchase Area Development District Office at (270) 247-7171 to learn more about assistance and support programs available to you and your "grandfamily."

all put in this situation. But now, it's a blessing. I wouldn't have it any other way."

The Hesters: Keeping family together

Only about 30 minutes away from the Dowdy grandfamily in Mayfield is a still-fresh grandfamily, the Hesters, in Almo.

Jean Hester has three grown children of her own, but five of her grandchildren live with her and her husband on the outskirts of Murray.

The Hesters' story started out much like the Dowdys'. Jean would often watch her oldest daughter's girls, Kiera and Trinity, as grandparents so often do. But it soon became clear to Jean that her granddaughters were not safe in her daughter and son-in-law's home, for various reasons. Even though Jean's husband had recently had a stroke, and money was tight, Jean adopted Kiera and Trinity, now 9 and 7 years old.

Despite the issues that led to Kiera and Trinity's adoption, their mother went on to have three more children, Tyler, Isabella and Aiden, now 5, 3 and 2, respectively. Both Tyler and Isabella were removed from their mother's care by the state, and Jean took them in. When her daughter had her fifth and final child, Aiden, Jean brought him home with her, straight from the hospital.

"I never, ever thought I'd be raising my grandkids, ever," Jean said, sitting at her kitchen table in her briefly quiet house. Kiera and Trinity were at school, and their younger brothers and sister were down for a nap.

"I didn't raise my kids like that," she said. "But you know, life can take some strange turns."

Jean's husband is still suffering from complications from his stroke and can do little to help with the kids. It's almost all up to Jean. With the help of the team at the Purchase Area Development District (PADD) Office, she gets whatever financial help she can through programs like Kentucky Caregiver Program and Kinship Care. The Calloway County Family Resource Center has been a blessing, too, she said, helping her get counseling for Kiera and Trinity.

Also, about a year ago she started going to the PADD Office's Calloway County Grandparents Raising Grandkids support group. Just getting to talk to other grandparents like her has helped tremendously. It helps her not feel so alone, she said, and as much as she loves her grandbabies, she cherishes the chance to get out of the house and "talk to grownups."

"There's never any 'me' time," Jean said. "I never have time alone. But that's just the way it is when you've got little kids. And of course I had to really think about potty training. It was so much easier when I was 24 years old! Now I'm 48. I thought I'd be enjoy-

ing my grandkids: spoiling them and then sending them back home. But there's a reason for everything. I couldn't see them nowhere else. I'm not going to let anybody else mistreat them. They've been through enough."

Jean hopes that one day her daughter will be in a better place, and better able to care for her children. Her daughter's missing everything, Jean said — Isabella's first steps; Aidan's first steps; their first teeth; their first words. She missed it all, because she just wasn't there.

The kids all call Jean "Nan Nan," but she's their mother. She said her heart breaks a little for her daughter when she hears the older girls telling other kids that their mom is like their sister. It's hard for them all, Jean said, but much like the Dowdys and so many other grandparents in her second-parent-hood shoes, she has no regrets.

"If I had to do it over again, I would," Jean said. "I just don't see my life without 'em. They're what makes my life complete, my grandkids. Because that's what you're supposed to do. You love your grandkids. You just have to take it one day at a time. I just hope (my daughter) finally got herself together, because someday I won't be here. And I just love these kids, too much I guess."

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GUNS

CONTINUED FROM 1A

lice," Masse said. "Now, we have law-abiding citizens exercising their Second Amendment rights."

While Kentucky recognizes many other states' concealed-carry permits, Illinois does not. Masse believes Illinois will, eventually.

Both states require residents to receive training from certified instructors complete an application form with background information that is sent to the state police for approval. In Illinois, approval can take up to 90 days. In Kentucky, approval of a paper application takes up to 60 days, and only 15 days with an electronic application.

In Kentucky, applications are available from the sheriff's departments. Mike Turnbow, McCracken County chief deputy sheriff, said he has noticed an increase in the number of women applying for conceal-carry permits.

"It may be a combination of things," Turnbow said, "like a sign of the times, or maybe a member of their family urged them to do it."

Turnbow said he has no problem with citizens who are legally able to carry concealed weapons, believing "you have a right to defend yourself, your family, and your home."

For the most part, Turnbow said the department has not had any issues related to people who are legally carrying



ELLEN O'NAN | The Sun

Kacey Clanahan aims her Springfield XDS 9mm pistol at a target inside the range in Paducah's Shooter's Supply on Friday afternoon.

concealed weapons. The exception, he said, would be someone who may have a conceal-carry permit but be involved in a domestic violence situation, for instance, and be required to relinquish the permit as part of a protection order.

Chance Clanahan, manager at Paducah Shooter's Supply, said interest in conceal-carry weapons and accessories has increased in the past few months.

"Kentucky has been pretty well the same for a long time," Clanahan said. "After the 2008 election we saw a big spike, and now we're seeing a resurgence. Interest in conceal-carry is going strong now."

Clanahan said the store sells a lot of revolvers like the Smith & Wesson J-frame revolvers Model 642, 637, and 638, and the Ruger LC9, as well as semi-automatic weapons like the Springfield XDs 9mm.

"It definitely matters what type of gun you buy," Clanahan said. "If you're going to carry it, you've got to go with a gun that fits your lifestyle."

Shooter's Supply offers

firearms classes and has a shooting range used for proficiency testing. Clanahan agrees conceal-carry is growing in popularity among women.

"It's a pretty even ratio right now, but the number of women is definitely growing," Clanahan said. "Handgun sales to women are way up."

Sales related to conceal-carry go beyond weapons.

"We stock purses designed to carry handguns, with special pockets with holsters, and all sorts of garments like jackets and vests with built-in holsters," Clanahan said. "They are all designed to make carrying a gun easier."

Jackie Wallace, an assistant store manager at Rural King in Paducah, said sales relating to conceal-carry are up. "I have difficulty keeping some weapons on the shelves," Wallace said, of popular handgun models from manufacturers like Glock.

He, too, sees a high demand for clothing and accessories.

"The conceal-carry purses ... they fly out of here."

Dillard's

PRESIDENTS' DAY WEEKEND

SAVINGS

SAVE NOW ON SELECT FALL & WINTER FASHIONS

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50%

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