Chicago Tribune

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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21, 1997

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HOLIDAY HELPERS
For those who have trouble coping with the stresses of the season, there's Metropolitan Family Services.
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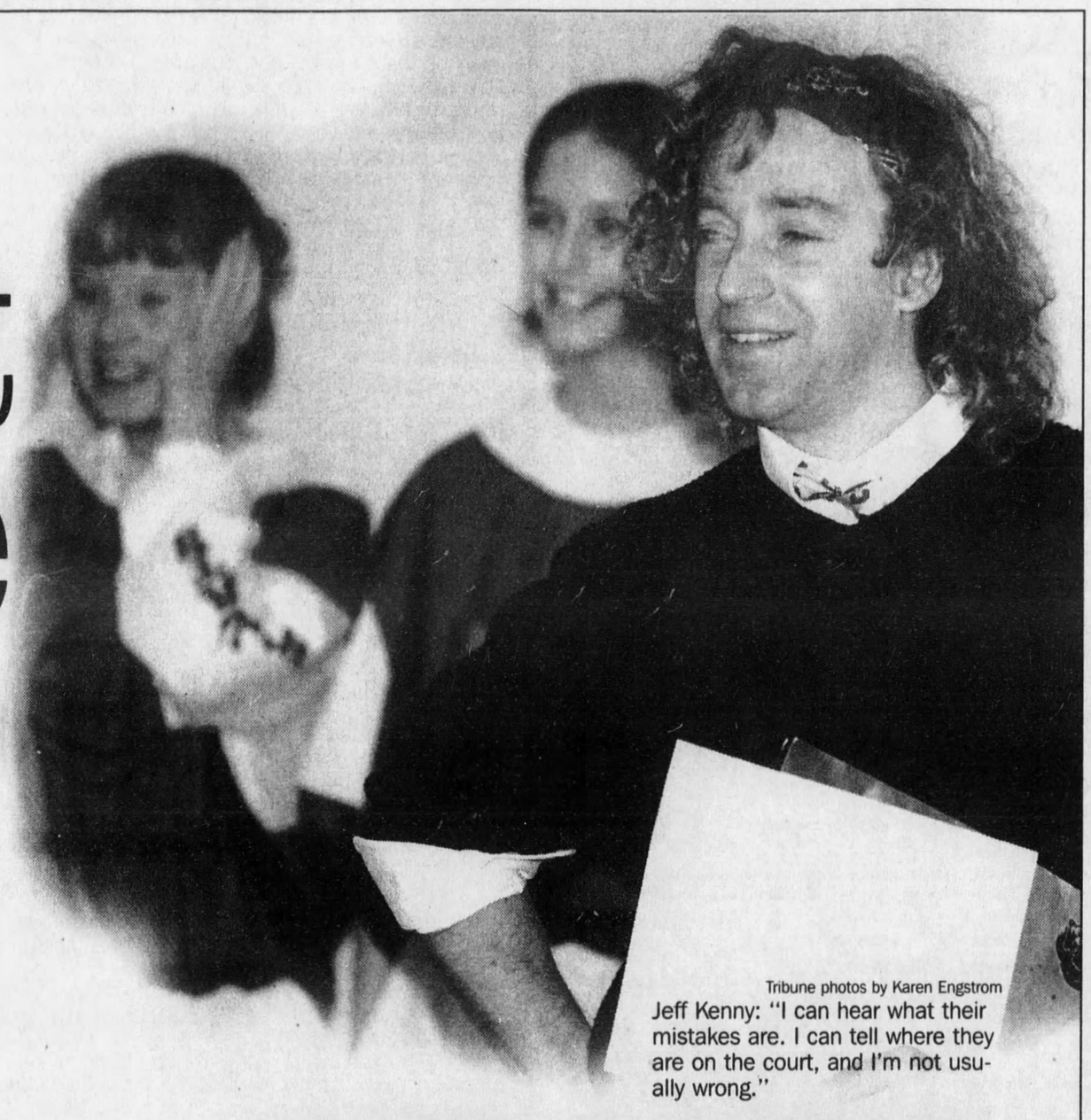
Court sense

To his 7th-grade hoopsters, coach Jeff Kenny's blindness is no obstacle to basketball success

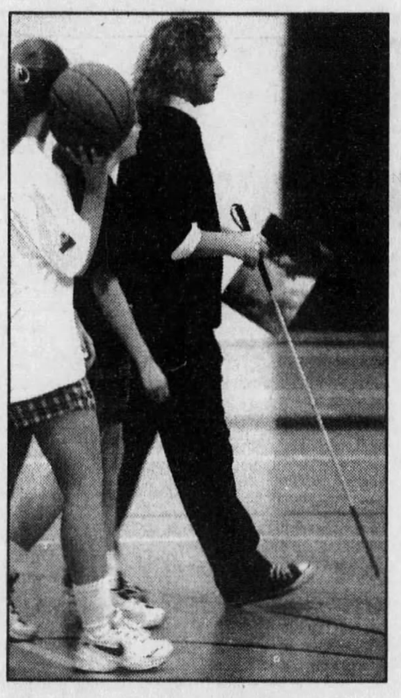


Tribune photos by Karen Engstrom
Jeff Kenny: "I can hear what their mistakes are. I can tell where they are on the court, and I'm not usually wrong."

By John Owens
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

Mention a grade-school basketball coach, and the image conjured up may be that of a middle-aged dad with a slight paunch.

It's a description that fits Jeff Kenny — to a certain extent. Kenny, who coaches the 7th-grade girls basketball team at Queen of Martyrs Elementary School in Evergreen Park, is a dad. But that's where Kenny and the mental picture part company.



Kenny has been legally blind since a job-related accident 14 years ago.

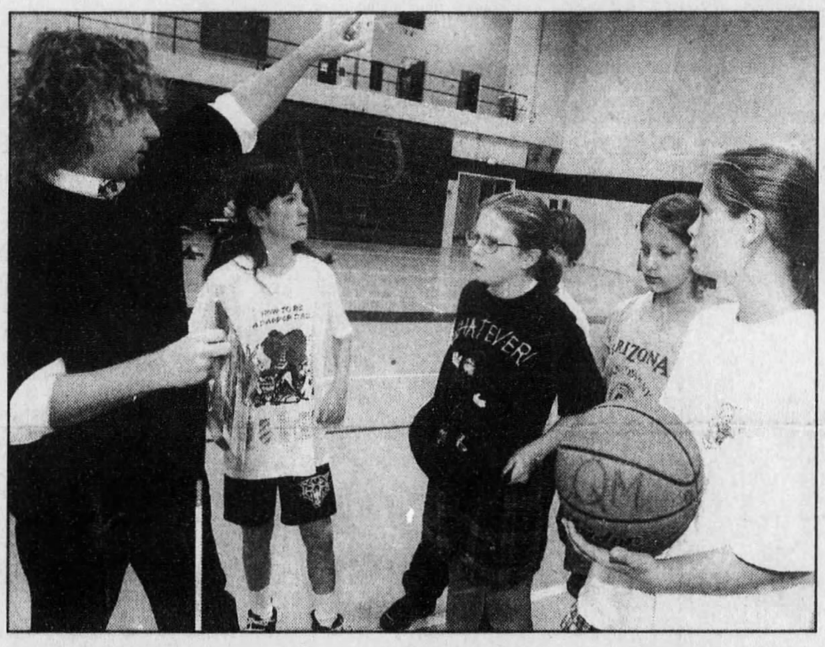
Kenny is 35, but this father of four could pass for 10 years younger.

Most amazing, though, is that Kenny has been legally blind since he was 21, when he lost his sight in an accident at a meat-packing plant. Although he can see only the faintest of images, Kenny is able to envision what his basketball players are doing on the court.

"It's amazing how he knows what's going on throughout the games," says Julie McKendry of Chicago's Mt. Greenwood neighborhood, a 16-year-old Mother McAuley High School student and Kenny's assistant coach. "Even though he can only see a little, like shadows, he knows what's going on. He goes to a lot of Bulls games, so he uses what he gets there on the girls."

Kenny, who played basketball and football throughout grade school, high school and college, has an innate sense of what is going on with his players. Call it the ultimate court sense.

"I usually know where they are on the floor or what they're doing," Kenny says. "I can tell by the bounce of the ball whether or not someone is double-dribbling or if they're walking by the sound of the ball and their feet. I can hear what their mistakes are. I can tell where they are on the court, and I'm not usually wrong."



Kenny takes a low-key approach in his coaching. "If we lose, he doesn't yell at us," says Katie Hill, who plays guard for the Wildcats. "He'll just tell us what we did wrong."

In his first year coaching the team, Kenny's win-loss record indicates he hasn't been exaggerating. Queen of Martyrs, which plays in the Ridge Park District League in Chicago and the Evergreen Park District League, finished the season in November with a combined record of 15-14 in the two divisions. They lost in the first round of the playoffs in the Evergreen Park League, and finished fourth among the eight teams in the Ridge Park League.

The team will play once more this year, in Mayor Richard M. Daley's Holiday Hoops Tournament on Dec. 27 at McCormick Place in Chicago. But in the three months the team has played together under Kenny, bonds that go beyond basketball

SEE COACH, PAGE 2

Q&A

A chat with Kris Kringle

Don Morris, 71, of Gardner has been helping Santa Claus for 12 years by listening as boys and girls, big and little, offer their wish lists for Christmas. Morris, who retired as the superintendent of Gardner Elementary School District 72C in 1986, is now in his seventh season as Kris Kringle at Louis Joliet Mall in Joliet.

Q. What is popular this year?

A. Barbie is popular with the girls. Nintendo 64 is popular with the boys. Some of the kids want to ride Santa's sleigh. They have watched the Tim Allen movie ("The Santa Clause") and they want to ride Santa's sleigh. There are a lot of requests for Walking Barbie.

Q. What do the boys and girls ask about Santa?

A. They ask about the reindeer, where are they and what are they doing. Some ask if I am real. I try to change the subject, but if they persist, I say, "You can believe what you want to believe."

Q. What is popular with older boys and girls?

A. Older girls want boyfriends. Boys are wanting a million dollars. Some of the girls want automobiles. I ask them what year of school they are in, and if they are sophomores, I say, "Have you taken driver's education?" If they say yes, I say Santa will do the best he can. In fact, you might look in your stocking Christmas morning.

Q. What are some of the memorable requests you have had over the years?

A. There was an occasion when a couple came up and talked to Santa. I asked the girl what she wanted and she said, "I want this guy to marry me." I said, "Has he asked yet?" She said no. I turned to this fellow and said, "If you don't propose to this girl, there will be nothing in your Christmas stocking." A few minutes later, they came out of a jewelry store and she held up her finger and she had a diamond on it.

Q. What does Santa want this year when he goes down the chimney?

A. Cookies. Cookies. They should have cookies and milk for Santa. When they ask what Santa wants for Christmas, I say, "I just want all the boys and girls to be happy."

Ken O'Brien

SouthwestTalk

Santa's helpers: Some Joliet police officers recently became elves for 50 disadvantaged youngsters.

For the seventh straight Christmas, the department held its "Shop with a Cop" benefit to help Joliet youngsters nominated by principals at the city's public and private schools.

On a recent Saturday morning, 50 children took a 90-minute shopping spree at the Joliet Kmart. With an officer pushing the cart, each kid was able to pick out $50 worth of toys.

"It's fun," said 6-year-old Amber as she filled a cart with the help of Officer Jim Ryan. She chose, among other things, the Crocodile Dentist game, earmuffs and pink pajamas. Ryan, like the other 49 officers involved, dug into his own pocket to cover any part of the tab that topped $50.

A few aisles away, brothers Alex, 9, Matt, 8, and Sam, 5, were peeking in each other's shopping bags, spying a videotape, Nerf gun, truck and race-car set.

"Alex, when we get home, want to play cars?" Sam asked.

"It is awesome," the boys' mother, Cami, said of the benefit. "It shows the kids that Christmas is not just about commercialism."

The department started the benefit in 1991 to reach out to needy children. In the first few years, the department raised only enough money to buy gifts for a dozen or so children, said Capt. Bill Fitzgerald, who coordinates the program. This year, by selling "Shop with a Cop" pins, the department raised enough money to help 50 kids. The Kmart store donated a breakfast and money from in-store fundraisers throughout the year and opened the store a half-hour early for the shopping spree. When the kids were done, they received a gift from Santa too.

"You know it is special when you see the glow on the faces of the kids," Fitzgerald said.

Ken O'Brien

From one tree . . .

. . . and an aluminum one at that, American Sales has nurtured a forest of Christmas merchandise

By Michele Mohr
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

The Christmas tree room at the American Sales store in Orland Park is an artificial but enchanting forest of spruces, firs and pines. Snow brushes the tips of some trees; small electronic birds chirp from within the branches of others. The trees are draped with sparkling garlands and twinkling lights and topped with elegant bows, bright stars or angels lighted from within. The branches are weighted with ornaments available for purchase in the adjacent aisles: globes of hand-blown glass, brass Santas, ceramic bells, banjo-playing teddy bears.

"I just love Christmas," said Bob Jones Sr., 59, president and founder of American Sales. "It is a tremendous amount of work because we have so many items. But I remember we began with just one type of tree — a silver aluminum tree with satin ornaments lighted by a revolving color wheel."

Tribune photo by John Smierciak
The American Sales store in Orland Park contains aisle upon aisle of merchandise on two levels to fulfill the desires of even the most ardent Christmas decorator.

American Sales opened for business in 1960 in Chicago's Roseland neighborhood. Toys made up the bulk of the merchandise, and Jones gradually added seasonal items during the next couple of years.

Jones and his family — wife Dolores and children Bob Jr., Sandy and Mary Ellen, all of whom live in Crete — currently operate six stores in the south and southwest suburbs, and the regional retailer has become a destination of choice for holiday decorators.

The company is sponsoring a

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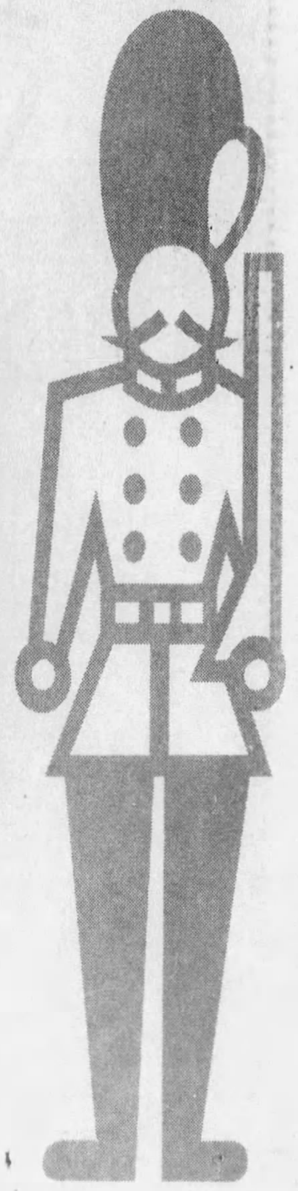

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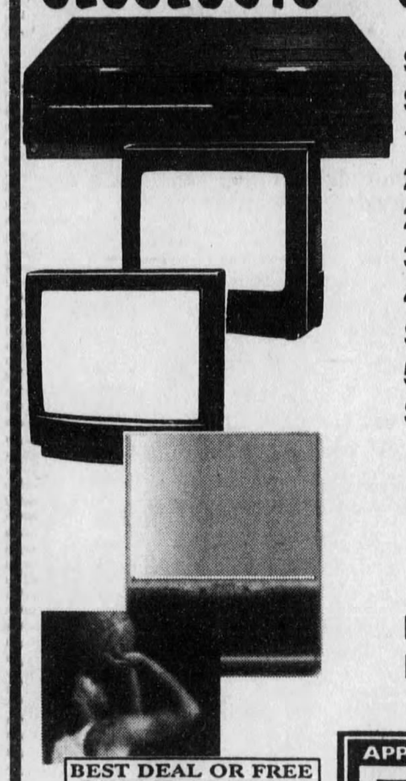

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In Sunday's
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ARTS & entertainment

Stores

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a Christmas decorating contest for area homeowners and recently hosted Mary Edsey, author of "The Best Christmas Decorations in Chicagoland" (Tabagio Press, $21.95), who is one of the contest judges, at the Orland Park store. "People showed me pictures of their displays and tried to convince me theirs was the best," Edsey said.

"People really go wild," said Edsey, who has logged 10,000 miles and interviewed more than 1,000 homeowners for her book. "They were coming past me pushing cartloads full of decorations — obviously on their way to becoming avid decorators."

Beginning with that single tree and satin ornaments in red, green and gold, American Sales stores now offer a multitude of items. There is aisle after aisle of bows: red, white, green, gold, silver, pink and maroon, of satin and velvet, adorned with snowflakes and bells and trimmed with gold braid.

Strings of white and multicolored lights and connector sets are joined by bulbs nestled in clusters of holly or roses. Lighted angels and doves, gingerbread men, candy canes and icicles are stacked next to blinking strings of miniature basketballs, soccer balls, cowboy boots and M&M candies. Shoppers also can choose from laser stars, bubble lights, flicker lights, twinkle lights and fiber optics.

Nativity scenes, carousels, miniature snow villages, wreaths, tree skirts, giant lawn ornaments and window decorations round out the seasonal offerings. New this year are net lights, with bulbs attached to large, square pieces of green netting, for trees and shrubbery. Trees already strung with lights are an increasingly popular item, Jones said.

Preparations for Christmas begin in December of the previous year. "We listen to what our customers are asking for," Jones said.

January through April, the company is buying stock, and seasonal items arrive in May to be stored in the warehouse. Most of the stock is transferred to the stores by Sept. 1. And decorating of trees is under way by Oct. 1, according to Sandy Jones, who grew up dusting toys in her father's store and is now a designer for the company.

"My mom started doing the trees," she said. "They were the bottle-brush type. Now the trees look real."

Sandy, 37, said she directs the setup and decoration of approximately 500 trees at the six stores. "I have four or five people helping me in each store, and it still takes six weeks to finish," she said.

The displays are designed to provide customers with ideas and inspiration.

"We'll do a theme, but mostly it is the traditional tree that's hung with all the favorite family ornaments," she said.

"We try to show people how they can make up different things," Jones Sr. said. "And we try to keep our prices reasonable so people can afford it."

When Lori Chojnacki of Orland Park wanted to find something new for Christmas, "I immediately thought about coming here," she said as she browsed through the animated musical scenes at the Orland Park store.

Barbara Hartman of Bourbonnais said she toured the Christmas tree room looking for ideas. "I'm looking for ornaments, and I know they have a good selection."

"It's hard to believe all the different products," Jones Sr. said. "The category has expanded in every direction."

Christmas isn't the only category that has increased at the company. In addition to holiday items, American Sales retails swimming pools and patio furniture during spring and summer and pool tables year-round. The Casual Furniture Association, a trade group, has named American Sales one of the association's top 10 retailers for each of the last five years. And in 1996, American was at the top of that group of 10, based on sales, displays and customer service, and received the Apollo Award.

"The American Sales stores are very service oriented. The main focus is customer satisfaction," said Karla Carey, director of marketing for the association, located at the Merchandise Mart in Chicago. Industry representatives recently visited American Sales' Tinley Park headquarters to discuss retailing trends. "Bob does a good job of getting the word out about what he carries, and he seems very knowledgeable about his customers' needs," Carey said.

"Find a job you love and you'll never work a day in your life," Jones said, explaining his philosophy for success. "I always try to do the right thing and take care of my customers 110 percent."

The company recently built a 118,000-square-foot corporate headquarters and warehouse at 8401 W. 185th St., Tinley Park, but it opened for business 37 years ago in a 20-by-50-foot storefront at 113th Street and Michigan Avenue.

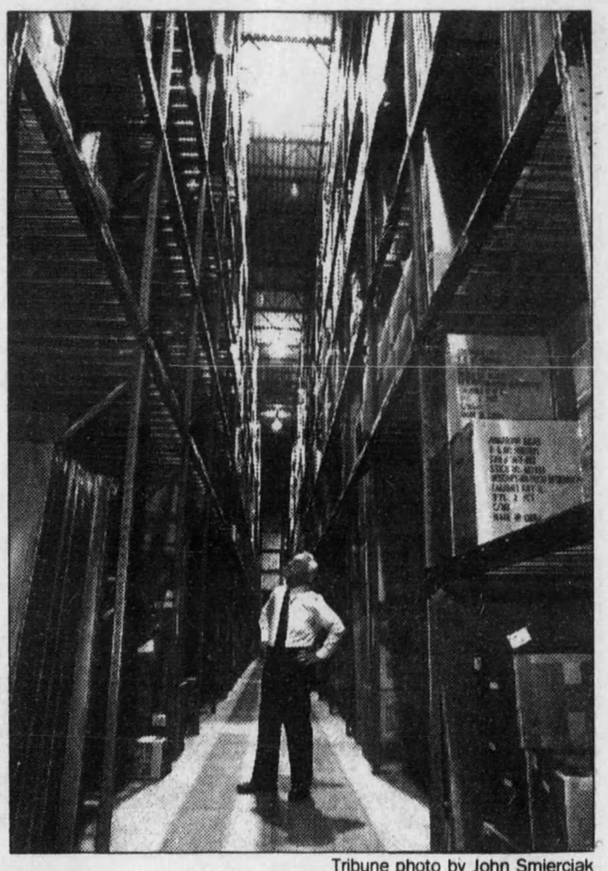
As a boy, Jones shined shoes in his father's barber shop; he briefly worked as a barber before opening the first store.

"I opened my first store at 21. I never really worked for anybody else," he said.

The Roseland store was a narrow but deep storefront with large display windows.

"I didn't have any displays. I bought orange crates at Water Street for 25 cents, and I bought lumber and made shelves," he said. "I found an old door and laid it on top of a couple of crates for a checkout counter."

Two aisles of toys were stacked floor to ceiling; customers walked down one narrow aisle and up the next to the checkout counter. On the counter was an ornate Merchant's cash register with a gold-plated handle. Jones paid $35 for the register, which has been restored and is on display in a conference room at the corporate headquarters.



Tribune photo by John Smierciak
Bob Jones surveys the merchandise in his Tinley Park warehouse.

Jones opened his second store, at 89th Street and Harlem Avenue in Bridgeview, in 1971. Several years later, he opened a store in suburban Lansing; he then closed the Roseland store and phased out toys. The Merrillville, Ind., store opened in 1985, followed by the Orland Park store in 1986. Bolingbrook opened in 1993, and an outlet store at the new headquarters is the most recent retail center opened.

The company employs about 150 full- and part-time workers during the holiday season, and Jones, despite his executive duties, often works the sales floor at the various locations. He dons one of the red sales associates shirts provided to all employees and helps stock shelves, assist customers and ring up sales.

"I get a better feel for what is going on. I find out what my customers want," Jones said. Shoppers, though, are sometimes surprised to find out the smiling, white-haired man is actually the company president.

"We had one customer tell the store manager that there was a 'crazy man' going around telling people he owned the store," Jones said, laughing.

Jones is particular about his stores, his merchandise and warehouse. Samples are stacked around the offices. "I like to see and feel the products," Jones said.

The warehouse is spotless, and employees are provided with cleaned and pressed uniforms. Electronic guidance systems built into the floor streamline the process of selecting merchandise, which is stacked in eight levels measuring a total of 40 feet high.

While Christmas merchandise is being sold in the stores, patio furniture is already arriving at the warehouse. Trucks delivering tables with umbrellas are backed up to several of the 19 loading docks, while smaller vans and trucks are loaded with pool tables to be delivered and installed.

Next to the warehouse is the company's outlet store. It features overstocks for half-price, and Jones said it is always stocked with fresh merchandise.

The Tinley Park facility opened in 1996, and Jones is constructing another building on an adjacent piece of property. That building will be leased to other companies until American needs more room. "I wanted a building large enough that we could grow into it," Jones said.

The company was previously headquartered in Calumet City, and the move to the southwest suburbs tripled the space.

Jones chose the Tinley Park location for its exposure along Interstate Highway 80. The interstate highway is just a couple hundred feet from the rear of the large, white warehouse and outlet store, and large billboards beckon eastbound travelers to exit at Harlem Avenue. The interstate access also makes shipping to and from stores and manufacturers easier.

As a regional chain, Jones said his company can be more flexible than national companies and can take advantage of special buys and off-season merchandise.

"We are seeking that discretionary income," he said. "A lot of thought goes into our products and displays, and we are very price sensitive."

Jones attends major trade shows and also shops the discount and department stores for price comparisons; the company offers a price-matching policy. He also listens to his customers. Several years back, when shoppers started looking for more outdoor items — large plastic Santas, candy canes, snowmen — he passed along those suggestions to his manufacturers; those items are now among the manufacturers' most popular, he said.

"I have a tremendous respect for my customers," Jones said. Although the retailer advertises in newspapers and on radio and television, his best advertising is word of mouth.

"We get a lot of repeat business," he said. "But I never take anything for granted. My feeling is that I have to earn people's business each year."

Coach

Continued From Page 1

have been established. That's because Kenny, who works full time as a counselor for troubled teens, has a knack for treating young people with the respect they often don't receive from adults.

"If we lose, he doesn't yell at us," says Katie Hill, who plays guard for the Wildcats. "He'll just tell us what we did wrong."

"He likes to win, but that's not the big thing," adds Michelle Mahoney, a guard/forward. "It's for everyone to play and have fun. He's not rushing you to do things. If you have a question, he'll take time to answer it."

The squad Kenny leads, the Queen of Martyrs "B" team, is stocked with players who aren't necessarily as talented as the "A" team 7th graders, though the coach makes sure they all get time on the court. Off the court, he makes sure the team sticks together by taking them on outings outside school.

"The 'B' teams are kind of treated unfairly compared to the 'A' teams, so when I started I got them warmup [suits], had a pizza party and bought them jump ropes," Kenny said. "They know that I really care about them. If they have a problem or think something's unfair, then they let me know."

His team plays an intense, full-court pressing defense that relies on turnovers for scoring. The Wildcats lost three players from last year's team to the Queen of Martyrs 7th grade "A" squad. They're led by Kenny's daughter Caitlin at guard/forward, Michelle Mahoney at guard/forward and Hill at guard.

"We knew we weren't going to be a great offensive team, because some of the better players moved up," Kenny said. "So we started at the beginning of the year pressing on defense. We're one of the lower-scoring teams but one of the better defensive teams in the league. We're really scrappy."

Kenny's coaching style is low-key and friendly. After teaching the team some basic plays, he allows team members to call their own plays in games. And when his players make mistakes, he rarely chastises them.

"He doesn't scream a lot, and he lets everyone play the same amount in a game," Caitlin Kenny says. "When we play really good teams, then the starters play more, but when we play the [weaker] teams, then he lets other people play a lot more."

Kenny says this is the key to handling young players.

"Winning and losing are insignificant [compared] to how they feel about themselves," Kenny says. "I want in 5 or 10 years to say that this was a lot of fun and it was different. I want these girls to have something in their lives to feel good about."

Game situations illustrate the drawbacks of a blind coach. He can't question a referee's call, point out a player's mistake or see the offenses and defenses that opponents are using.

"The biggest problem with him coaching is the refs," says his

See Coach, Page 4

Coach

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

wife, Lisa. "You need to be on them, but you have to see the foul to be able to say something."

Still, Kenny has help from others courtside. He'll ask McKendry about the plays his team and the opposing team are running, and players also pitch in with information.

"Usually, when a player is on the bench, they'll tell him what's going on in the games," Caitlin says. "And if we already call a play and the defense suddenly changes, then Julie will call us to switch."

Tom Newberry, who coaches the 7th grade girls at St. Catherine of Alexandria School in Oak Lawn, just finished his first year leading a team. like Kenny. "It didn't seem like the blindness affected the game when his team played my team," Newberry says. "The flow of the game seemed perfectly normal."

Kenny maintains that he can distinguish action on the court by sound, thanks to his years as a high school and college athlete, though football was his sport of choice in his years at St. Albert Elementary School and St. Laurence High School in Burbank.

"I wanted to play both sports, but football was so serious then, so I just played that," Kenny recalls. "We had a real good team. My senior year, we were in the state championship. Sports was good for me because it kept me off the streets and out of trouble, and football was a year-round thing at St. Laurence. I played basketball just to keep in shape."

He received a football scholarship to St. John's University in Minnesota, where he played for one season.

"But it was too small, kind of in the middle of nowhere, so I came back to the city," Kenny said.

After bouncing around at a couple of colleges in the area, Kenny met Lisa, and sports receded in importance. They soon married, and Lisa became pregnant with their first child, Denise. Kenny found work as a refrigeration engineer at the Ampac Corp., a meat-packing plant at 42nd Street and Racine Avenue in Chicago. It was there that his life changed forever.

"I was repairing a pipe when it exploded in my face," Kenny recalls. "One of the other guys was hurt, his arm was burned, but I lost my sight."

The explosion damaged his corneas, something he didn't try to fix for another eight years.

"At that point I decided that my kids were getting a little older and I didn't want them wondering why I didn't try to make the effort to see them," Kenny said. "So for their sakes, I had some surgery done and it gave me a little sight for three months, then it went away. There's so much damage to my eyes, there's really nothing I can do unless I want to get desperate or drastic, and I got used to this right from the start so it never really bothered me that much."

Kenny went back to school. He enrolled at St. Xavier College (now University), where he received a bachelor's degree in sociology, then went on to the University of Chicago, where he earned a master's degree in the field. He then went into social work and counseling and five years ago started his own practice with offices in downtown Chicago, Evergreen Park and Oak Lawn. His specialty: working with pregnant and suicidal teenagers.

"Getting my master's was a new challenge, and I love challenges," Kenny said. "All that stuff I discovered in social work is a world I never knew about when I had sight. All I knew about was sports and fun, because I was a young guy. This was a whole new world for me."

He volunteered to teach Sunday school at Queen of Martyrs and for the World Association of Infant Mental Health. For entertainment, he bought season tickets to Bears, Bulls and Blackhawks games.

"I don't want to do one thing, I want to do several," Kenny says. "All of these things interest me so much, as long as I don't get bored. And when I start feeling bored, I find something else to get interested in."

After his daughters Caitlin and Denise began playing basketball last year for Queen of Martyrs, Kenny became involved in sports again on a personal level. When the coach of the Queen of Martyrs "B" team resigned, Kenny volunteered and school officials were immediately receptive. If Kenny hadn't stepped in, the team was in danger of disbanding.

"None of the other parents was volunteering to take over the team," says Dave Marzec, athletic director for Queen of Martyrs. "We didn't have qualms about it because it all seemed natural to us. He's been around for years, and all the parents knew him."

"I felt this was my chance," Kenny recalls. "I didn't want those girls to miss out on the chance of playing, because once they got to high school they might not get that chance, or they might not want to do it."

The burden of transportation for the team has fallen on Lisa Kenny, who doesn't see it as a burden.

"I think it's great," she said of her husband's involvement with the team. "It teaches the girls that you can do anything."

Kenny and his wife live in the Mt. Greenwood neighborhood of Chicago with their three daughters — 14-year-old Denise, 13-year-old Caitlin and 6-year-old Ellen — and 9-year-old son, Patrick. Because of their father's interest in athletics, all of the children are interested in sports, Caitlin in particular. But playing for her father, that was something else again.

"He really likes basketball, and he always talked about coaching at home, but I didn't want him to do it at first," Caitlin says. "I didn't want him to do it because he was my dad."

She has come around, however, and now enjoys playing for her dad, even though Kenny does not play favorites.

"My daughter, when it comes to basketball, it's almost like she's not my kid," Kenny said. "I don't think I treat her special in any way. She's a good player, but one time I yelled at her during a game, and Julie told me that I was a lot harder on Caitlin than on the rest of the players. But that's because I know at home I can make it up to her. We easily go from father and daughter to coach and daughter."

Newberry admires the job Kenny has done. "His girls seemed like a classy group and that's probably a reflection of the coach," he says.

And Kenny sees the coaching position as an adjunct to his counseling career.

"I consider this the most enjoyable thing I do, other than spending time with my kids," Kenny says. "It's kind of like social work. The girls all have their individual problems. Several of the girls come from single-parent families. We have a girl on the team who lost her mom a year ago. To me, for an 11-year-old girl, that's a lot harder than losing your sight."

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In The Spotlight

Your South & Southwest Suburban Guide For Dining & Entertainment

Fox's Restaurant & Pub
• Fox's Beverly
• Fox's Oak Lawn
• Fox's Orland Park

Oak Lawn Hilton
Cicero Ave. at 94th Street
708-425-7800

Ludwig's Club Cafe
FREE Complimentary Capuccino With This Ad
7206 Calumet Avenue
1/2 Mile North
(after the 2nd light) of I-80
Calumet Avenue Exit
(219) 933-4477
FAX 933-8155
Major Credit Cards Accepted

Iwans Catering

TAJ MAHAL
(708) 460-5800

ROCKWELL INN
Affordable Elegance
(815) 942-6224

CABARET & DINING

FOX'S RESTAURANTS
Holiday party season is here. Business or a family - Fox's is a choice in quality. Catering-Delivery fresh & hot to your door, everything from pizza to complete chicken & beef packages. Banquet facilities for 30 to 150 persons. Package priced meals or let Fox's customize a menu. Call Fox's for your banquet or catering info guide.
OAK LAWN - 9240 S. Cicero - (708) 499-2233
ORLAND PARK - 9655 W. 143rd - (708) 349-2111
BEVERLY - 9956 S. Western - (773) 239-3212

CATERING

BARTOLINI'S
Looking to cater an event large or small give the Bartolini's a call we can do it ALL. Specializing in Italian Cuisine choose from our catering menu or let us help you design the perfect menu for your occasion. Enjoy choices such as Lasagna, Sausage & Peppers, or Grilled Lemon Chicken homemade by Chris & Dominic graduates of CIA (Culinary Institute of America). Everything is homemade with the freshest of ingredients. Please call Dawn, Chris or Dominic for our catering menu or join us for lunch or dinner. 14420 S. Pulaski, Midlothian call 708-396-BEEF.

IWANS CATERING OF ORLAND PARK
Christmas is right around the corner, let Iwan's cater your Family, Corporate, School or Civic gathering. Too busy with your Holiday shopping? Let Iwan's cook for your family. Our 20 piece chicken special with 2 lbs.of our homemade salad or broasted potatoes is a sure bet at just $14.99. Don't forget the Homemade Soup at just $3.29 per quart. Call today for a catering brochure (708)532-8814. Visit our website at www.iwans.com, or visit Digital City Orland Park for special coupon offers.

THE STRAND CAFE
Let us make your next party or gathering a unique experience...take out "Cajun Feasts" for 4 to 1,000 people. Serve authentic New Orleans Cajun Food that everyone will rave about! We have Jambalaya, Red Beans and Rice, Seafood Dirty Rice, Shrimp Creole, Seafood Crepes, Boiled Crawfish, Seafood Gumbo, Muffuletta Sandwich and much more call 630-257-2112.

RESTAURANTS

CARRIAGE GREENS COUNTRY CLUB
Enjoy the relaxing surroundings of our friendly dining facilities, daily and weekends. Open Mon. thru Thurs. 11 am to 10 pm; Fri. Sat. & Sun. 'til 11 pm. Special Ribs on Wed. & Fri. $10.95. 'ALL YOU CAN EAT' Fish Fry on Fridays. For Golf Outing & Tee Times Call 630-985-3730. Banquet Facilities Available. 8700 Carriage Greens, On Frontage Rd., just W. of Cass and I-55 Darien (630) 985-3400.

HOBKNOBS
Exciting, Creative & Classic. The perfect place for Anniversaries. Birthdays or special business meetings. Listen to our pianist and dine on exciting selections from Chef Kevin Kincaid. All new menu starting at $13.95. Parlor Room available - up to 45 for parties, showers, private business meeting, day or night. Attended childrens playroom. Open for Lunch, $5.95 to $8.95/ 8101 West 123rd St. Palos Park - 708-923-1218.

RESTAURANTS

★LUDWIG'S CLUB CAFE
Ludwig's serves American and German Cuisine in a Bistro/Cafe type setting. Gracious service and good food are provided with a homey feeling and value pricing. Great Light n' Hearty breakfasts, breakfast buffets, lunches and dinners. We deliver to homes and businesses. Major credit cards accepted. Located 1/2 mile North (after the 2nd light) of I-80, Calumet Avenue exit.
7206 Calumet Avenue, (219) 933-4477 FAX 933-8155

MIA FIGLIAI
This trendsetting Chicago style restaurant offers Northern Italian style cuisine and is sure to be the perfect place to be before or after a visit to the Rialto Square Theatre or Harrah's Casino. If you love, really love Italian food you will be captured by Mia Figliai's menu and eclectic ambiance. Jazz piano bar Fridays and Saturdays. Valet parking. All major credit cards accepted. Mia Figliai located in City Center Joliet at 158 North Chicago Street Open 4-10pm Tuesday thru Saturday. Reservations requested. 815-722-6400.

PACINI
Italian Ristorante & Steak House. Classic menu of authentic Northern Cuisine. NOW OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK. Serving lunch & dinner. Lunch buffet $6.95 11a.m.-3p.m. daily. Kids under 3 FREE, 4-11 years 1/2 price. Monday specials - ALL PASTAS HALF PRICE, Dinner menu only (excluding seafood and special order pastas). Coffee classics. Gift Certificates. Open 11a.m. daily. (708) 403-5585. LaGrange Rd. & 151st Orland Park.

PALERMO'S FINE ITALIAN CUISINE
Savor the sweet aromas and the tastes of fine southern Italian cuisine, with expertly prepared veal, pasta, chicken and fresh seafood. Served in a charming Old World setting. Palermo's does it all, four star dining - voted Best Italian Restaurant in the southland, renowned catering and a new elegant banquet facility that can accommodate from 25 to 250. Our award winning cuisine and attention to detail is sure to make the very best impression for any of your events, from office parties to wedding receptions. Complimentary valet parking. Call for catering details! Open daily 4:00p.m. Closed Tuesday. Dinner Reservations suggested. All major credit cards accepted. 4849 West 95th St., Oak Lawn, IL (708) 425-6262.

THE PATIO RESTAURANTS INC.
Voted "Best Barbeque Ribs in Chicago Southland". Thick, meaty baby back ribs and tender, juicy chicken are cooked in special seasonings and smothered in rich, tangy barbeque sauce. Homemade soups, salads, beef and burgers make us the perfect place for family dining or fast carry out. 7440 W. 159th, Orland Park, (708) 429-7575 • 9115 S. Harlem, Bridgeview, (708) 598-2099

THE PIT RIB HOUSE
Have a taste for Barbeque? The Pit Rib House specializes in wood smoked Bar-B-Que over an open pit. Main course meals include: BBQ Baby Back Ribs, Rib Tips, Chicken, Souvlaki (shi-ke-bab in the states) and our biggest seller, Southern-style BBQ chopped pork. Dine in or carry out. Visa, MasterCard, Am. Ex. CATERING AVAILABLE! 7 days a week, Lunch/Dinner. 9430 S. Roberts Road, Hickory Hills (708) 599-7576

RESTAURANTS

ROCKWELL INN
The Rockwell Inn is nestled among century-old towering oak trees and alongside a gentle creek. Dine surrounded by the classic works of Norman Rockwell both in pictures and figurines. Linger at the original Anheuser Busch bar crafted specifically for the 1893 Columbian Exposition World's Fair. Affordable Elegance Menu.
Fine Dining 7 days a week.
Lunch 11 a.m. - 3 p.m. Dinner 3 p.m. - Close.
Sunday Brunch 11 a.m. - 3 p.m. Early Bird Entrees Everyday.
2400 RT. 6 WEST, MORRIS, IL
815/942-6224

THE STRAND CAFE
Awesome New Orleans Style Cajun food, plus wonderful American menu for non-spicy food. We now feature Aged Black Angus Filet Mingon, New York Strip, Rib Eye, T-Bone and Porterhouse Steaks. Entertainment Wed., Fri. & Sat. nights. Located in an 1870 Limestone building along the I&M Canal. For great food & fun go to The Strand Cafe, 103 Stephen - Historic downtown Lemont. Open 7 days for lunch & dinner. Breakfast on Sat. & Sun. BYOB, casual attire 630-257-2112.

SYLS RESTAURANT & LOUNGE
Joliet, IL Two Minutes from Rt. 80 - Five Minutes from Empress Riverboat. Five minutes from Harrahs Riverboat. Will county's most elegant Sunday Brunch 10:30 - 3:00. Regular menu items also available. We specialize in Prime Rib, Prime Steaks, Chops, Ribs, Pasta, Fresh Seafood, Chicken, & Lobster. Accommodations For Private Parties. Family Owned Since 1946. Rt. 80 to Larkin South to Moen Ave.
Reservations (815) 725-1977.

TAJ MAHAL
Indian and Pakistani Restaurant. A one of a kind in the South Suburbs. Serving a tantalizing assortment of chicken, lamb, rice and seafood specialties, vegetarian delights, freshly baked bread from our clay oven, and delicacies from the tandoor. Select from our delicious menu, our lunch buffet for $7.95 and dinner buffet for $9.95, or call for carry-out. Gift certificates available. Located at 14812 South LaGrange Road in Orland Park (Dania Center)
(708) 460-5800.

UPTOWN GRILL
The beautiful Illinois Valley will soon look like a winter wonderland. There are several sights to take advantage of in the valley. Starved Rock provides breathtaking scenic views including the beautiful ice falls and the snow capped cliffs. If the weather doesn't bother you, a hike along the Illinois and Michigan canal is also a winter paradise. Both are near the Uptown Grill, a place you should not miss in this area. It features full service dining with an ala carte menu (along with one for the kids) that is available all day, everyday!
IL Route 80 West to Route 351 South to First Street. 601 First Street, LaSalle. 815-224-4545 or www.uptowngrill.com. All major credit cards accepted. Serving seven days a week for lunch and dinner.

WHITNEY'S BAR & GRILLE
Take time out from the holiday rush to enjoy a relaxing lunch or dinner in Whitney's. Luncheon and Dinner selections feature only the finest, freshest ingredients. Enjoy chic atmosphere, superb service, and stupendous selections. **Fabulous Sunday Breakfast Buffet** 8:00am - 1:45pm. Make reservations now for Christmas & New Years. Entertainment in Whitney's Lounge Tuesday through Saturday until 2:00am. Located in the Hilton Oak Lawn, Cicero Avenue at 94th Street, Oak Lawn. 708-229-8888.

Palermo's Fine Italian Cuisine Oak Lawn

Hobknobs IN THE PARK
8101 West 123rd St.
Palos Park, Illinois
708-923-1218

Mia Figliai

Carriage Greens Country Club Darien
(630) 985-3400

The Pit Rib House

Syl's

FOR MORE ENTERTAINING IDEAS SEE THE SUNDAY ARTS & THE FRIDAY SECTION. TO ADVERTISE CALL BARB HEPBURN 708-957-8966.

Wine List

the Patio Restaurants
Darien • Orland Park • Bridgeview

Pacini

Bartolini's Catering
Italian Beef and Pizzeria
708-396-BEEF

Uptown Grill
Serving All Day - Everyday
LaSalle, IL
Visit us anytime at... uptowngrill.com
Minutes from Starved Rock State Park
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