WINNING EYE
Prizes await those who guessed correctly at annual scavenger hunt
LIFE/D2
GOT IT ‘ACED’
University of Evansville confers degrees on 537 graduates Saturday
LOCAL/B1
Bringing Comfort Amid Destruction
Rolling aid center heads South to assist ravaged community

Monday, May 9, 2011
"When you have to work."
"You don’t have a holiday.
Ohio River floodwater didn’t sink Mother’s Day plans
Florist still attended son’s graduation
Planting long before her son’s high school graduation, a pose for Mother’s Day weekend, with high marks in time for another three-week period this year.
Posey County mother Nancy Healing and her family didn’t normally celebrate Mother’s Day weekend, but with much brevity, though she Healing started Healing Florist, 36, in 2005.
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Kathryn Martin plays with Jay’Mikia Bates, 3, at CJ’s Bus on Monday. Jay’Mikia and her three siblings lost everything when their home in Alberta City in Tuscaloosa, Ala., was destroyed by an F4 tornado on April 27. They now live in a Red Cross shelter at the Bak Activities Center at Bowers Park in Tuscaloosa with hundreds of other tornado victims.

BRINGING COMFORT AMID DESTRUCTION

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. — Leicia Fairchild was leaning against a fence at a park with her 9-week-old baby on Monday when a group of volunteers from Evansville’s CJ’s Bus offered her a seat under the shade of their tent.

Fairchild lost everything in the April 27 F4 tornado that destroyed her home here, taking with it hundreds of lives.

Red streaks, signs of a possible infection, showed on her leg after she stepped on nine nails climbing out of the rubble of her home. She had no shoes and had to bathe her baby in a bathroom sink at the nearby Red Cross shelter.

Within minutes of meeting her, volunteers from CJ’s Bus found clothing for Fairchild’s baby. A woman from a local church gave Fairchild the shoes off her feet. Other volunteers went to Walmart to buy a baby bath. Alyson Jackson, a volunteer from Gulf Shores, took Fairchild for a tetanus shot she desperately needed.

The volunteers set out from Evansville on April 30, three days after the deadly tornadoes swept through Alabama and much of the South, killing at least 329 people and destroying communities across seven states.

Disaster recovery is the mission of CJ’s Bus, a not-for-profit organization founded by Kathryn Martin, whose 2-year-old son, CJ, was among 25 people killed when a tornado swept through his neighborhood in Evansville.

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CJ’s Bus cruises along Interstate 65 in Tennessee on its way to Tuscaloosa, Ala., on April 30 in an effort to provide relief to the children of the tornado-ravaged area.

Matt Noble refuels CJ’s Bus while John Martin and Lissa Rust talk in the background. The bus stopped about every 70 miles for fuel. The weight of the modified school bus and steep grades of the highways led Noble to guess the fuel mileage at “about three miles per gallon.” Bob Rothschild of Evansville Garage Doors sought out the group the day before it left and offered to sponsor the cost of fuel.

Donna Feagley sits on the steps of CJ’s Bus as she waits with other volunteers for a new radiator to arrive along Interstate 65 near Warrior, Ala., on April 30. The volunteers were just a few hours away from reaching their destination when the bus struck a piece of storm debris in the roadway and were forced to stop for repairs. The group was stalled for several hours.

Matt Noble, far right, and John Martin look under the hood of CJ’s Bus as they assess the damage to the bus’ radiator after it struck a piece of storm debris along Interstate 65 about a half mile from Warrior, Ala., just more than 70 miles from their destination.

After 24 straight hours on the road with no sleep and little to eat, John Martin guides CJ’s Bus into a grassy field at Bowers Park in Tuscaloosa, Ala. The group was determined to meet the commitment they made to the community and local Red Cross shelter to be there on May 1 ready for children.

Kathryn Martin blows a kiss as she waves goodbye to tow-truck driver Richard Darrell of Cullman Towing in Cullman, Ala. Darrell made the tow run just after 4 a.m. on May 1 in order to help the bus reach its destination in time to host children early in the morning. No other towing company would make the tow before 10 a.m.

Matt Noble begins setting up CJ’s Bus shortly after arriving at Bowers Park in Tuscaloosa, Ala., as he pulls apart the walls of the passenger side of the bus.
across Evansville and the surrounding Tri-State in 2005. The aim of CJ’s Bus is to provide a safe place for children and a temporary distraction from the constant reminders of what they’ve lost.

Volunteers brought the bus to Tuscaloosa to help people like Monique Chandler and three of her children, Jay’Mon, Jay’Quan and Jay’Mikia Bates, who visited CJ’s Bus every day.

There’s nothing left of the place they used to call home.

“Baby, it’s gone, it’s all gone, there is nothing, it’s all gone,” said Sonjanice James, Chandler’s roommate, who brought the children to the bus daily. “We were in there when the tornado happened and we couldn’t do nothing but get in the tub. It took off the roof, it took the whole front of the building.”

That’s a memory Martin aims to replace for children with new ones created by CJ’s Bus.

“It’s great ... when there’s all these problems going on, that we can drop the kids off and not take them back to see what happened,” James said. “Most people don’t think that kids think about stuff like that, but they do. They wouldn’t come outside for two days.”

James said the bus inspired the children to come out of the shelter. In a short time, the bus became part of the community.

“Sadie Perez, 10, plays with stuffed animals outside of CJ’s Bus. More than 60 children came to the bus May 1 and taxed the group of 10 volunteers who were running on no sleep after the bus sustained radiator damage the night before.

Sadie Perez, 10, plays with stuffed animals outside of CJ’s Bus.

Tara Greenlee manages a large group of kids as they color and play games inside CJ’s Bus. More than 60 children came to the bus May 1 and taxed the group of 10 volunteers who were running on no sleep after the bus sustained radiator damage the night before.
Jay'Mikia Bates, 3, cries as she prepares to return to the Red Cross shelter her family now calls home after spending the day at CJ’s Bus on Tuesday. “They wake up every morning crying because they want to come to the bus,” Sonjanice James, the children’s aunt, said.

RIGHT: Monique Chandler sits with her four children after her three oldest, Jay’Mon, Jay’Quan and Jay’Quan Bates all returned from a day at CJ’s Bus on Tuesday. The children play with toys they received from the bus in their small corner of the Belk Activities Center at Bowers Park in Tuscaloosa, Ala., where the Red Cross shelter they now call home is located.

Jay’Quan Bates, 4, holds tightly to the shoulder of Tony Goben as he is walked to his aunt’s car to return to the shelter where his family now lives. Their home in Alberta City, a community of Tuscaloosa, Ala., was destroyed by an F4 tornado on April 27, and the family lost everything.

Jay’Quan takes a nap on the floor of CJ’s Bus on a yellow dinosaur stuffed animal that was donated to the bus. Bates and his three siblings find it hard to get any rest in the crowded Red Cross shelter they now live in, but all three got some needed sleep at CJ’s Bus on Tuesday.

Hundreds of cots fill one of two gymnasiums at the Belk Activities Center at Bowers Park. The recreation center is now home to more than 250 people who lost everything in the April 27 tornado that ravaged Tuscaloosa, Ala. This is the room that many of the children at CJ’s Bus return to every night when the bus closes its doors. Many residents complain it’s impossible to get any rest and that there’s little room for children to play at the shelter.