

flooded the low-lying coastal region and spawned more than 20 tornadoes 180,000 homeless, and caused damage estimated between \$15 billion and \$20

## Boy Missing In Flooded Creek

By Donald E. Franklin  
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

Police, firefighters and other rescue workers were keeping watch by River des Peres on Wednesday evening for a boy who reportedly was swept away in a nearby creek swollen by heavy rain.

A second boy who also was reportedly in the creek was pulled from the water alive about 7:30 p.m. near Steinberg Rink in Forest Park.

Capt. John Dennis of the University City Police Department said a call came in about 5:15 p.m. reporting that

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St. Louis Post Dispatch August 27, 1992, p.1

Clipped By:



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Fri, May 5, 2017

# Rain

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bones.

Lt. Joe Marcinkiewicz said, "Why don't we call this miraculous. Eric had two people with him — his angel and his God. I don't think anybody would have bet that we would have found anybody alive."

Police, firefighters and other rescue workers had checked manholes and had kept watch for Tony, the other boy, at nine different points along River Des Peres.

Capt. John Dennis of the University City Police Department said a call came in about 5:15 p.m. reporting that two boys had fallen into a creek in the 6700 block of Vernon Avenue. The boys had been playing with two other boys near the water.

When rescue workers reached the site, the water in the creek was about 12 feet deep and the current was up to 40 to 50 mph, Dennis said.

Just beyond the site near Vernon Avenue, the creek goes underground until it reaches the 6100 block of Maple Avenue.

Eric, who said he thought he had blacked out during part of his journey several miles through the underground sewer, told rescue workers that shortly after he went into the water, he saw his friend go under and hadn't seen him since.

Valerie Trumbo, Tony's 19-year-old sister, said the creek is a popular spot for boys to play and allows easy access to the water.

"I am sad, depressed and sick about this, and I just hope they find my brother," Valerie Trumbo said.

"I also hope this incident proves to be a lesson to all young children not to play around sewers or rushing water."

Last May, the body of 12-year-old Fennis Brown Jr. was pulled from River Des Peres four days after his family reported him missing.

Friends of the boy said Fennis had scaled the concrete bank of the river in the same area where Eric and Tony were playing Wednesday, and then slipped, fell in and drowned.

Eric's mother, Sharon Fortner, said, "I just thank God that he was saved. The rescue workers did a wonderful job, but when they told me how far he



Rescue workers peering into a manhole where a 14-year-old boy emerged after being caught in the rushing River des Peres.

went, I just knew that it was God's will for him to survive."

Fortner said Eric is a Boy Scout and attributed his survival to skills he had learned through scouting.

"I have always told him that when you don't use good judgment, it could cost you your life," Fortner said. "But I know that now he, and myself, will have a greater feeling of what it means to live, because in the blink of an eye, you can lose someone."

After climbing out of the manhole, Eric told the story of his ordeal to Boothe and to two men who had been fishing in the lake near the site.

Andrew Meachum and his son, Edmond Smith, said they had also heard someone yelling for help about an hour before Boothe found Eric.

Smith and Meachum both said they looked around and couldn't see anyone in need of help.

After Boothe helped the boy out, Meachum and Smith flagged down a motorist who told them she would go for the police. Rescue workers arrived shortly afterward.

Captain Ralph Break of the St. Louis Fire Department said that Eric probably just "popped up" into the sewer outlet in which he was found.

Break said River Des Peres runs under Forest Park and that numerous auxiliary sewers empty into the main River Des Peres stream.

"Chances are that [Eric] was pushed along by the water and popped up into this sewer," Break said. "There are U-shaped metal loops in

the tunnels and the boy apparently somehow got ahold of them and climbed up."

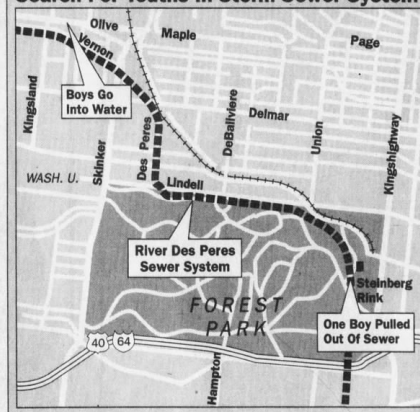
Officials with the Metropolitan Sewer District, the St. Louis Fire Department, the Emergency Medical Service and police from St. Louis and University City were initiating searches of sewer outlets in the park.

St. Louis police officers also had strung nets and lines across River Des Peres near the intersection of Manchester and Macklind avenues.

St. Louis Fire Chief Neil Svetanics said he was consulting with officials from MSD to determine whether it was safe for firefighters to take boats through the sewer tunnels.

The showers that caused the fast current in River Des Peres rolled into

## Search For Youths In Storm Sewer System



Post-Dispatch Map by Tony Lazorko

town Wednesday afternoon right behind a cold front.

In the course of the storm, lightning reportedly hit several homes in the Oakville area of south St. Louis County late Wednesday afternoon, but no fires resulted.

A home in Creve Coeur was extensively damaged after being struck by lightning, authorities said. The single-family residence, which is part of the Carlyle Lake Drive condominium development, was struck by lightning about 4:45 p.m. Wednesday. The roof caught fire, but no one was injured.

Police agencies in the St. Louis area reported a higher number of auto accidents because of the wet pavement and reduced visibility, but no fatal accidents were reported.

Today, the area can expect showers and cool temperatures, says a professional weather-watcher.

"There will be occasional rain showers off and on Thursday, and you'll be lucky to hit 70 degrees," said Chris Noles, a meteorologist at WeatherData Inc., a forecasting service in Wichita, Kan.

Noles said St. Louis can look forward to a good, soaking rain and a break in the heat. The low tonight will be about 59 degrees, he said.

Heavy rain and strong wind — a direct result of Tropical Storm Andrew — will stick to southern Missouri and Illinois, Noles said.

No official rainfall total was available Wednesday evening after a wave of storms swept through the city, but Noles said he would expect that as much as 2 inches fell within an hour.

On Wednesday, patches of rain with isolated thunderstorms were reported from northeastern through west-central Missouri, the National Weather Service said.

The Weather Service said some of the heavier showers could produce localized flooding.

The extended forecast is for rain in southeastern Missouri from Friday through Sunday, with little rain elsewhere. Highs should reach the mid-70s to low 80s with lows in the 50s.

Patricia Corrigan of the Post-Dispatch staff contributed information for this story.

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