

## Pole Position

Mark Aschen wants to take you higher this month

For three years now, spectators headed to St. Charles' Fourth of July Riverfest blowout have gotten their fireworks and cotton candy, plus a funky little something extra: pole-vaulting. Former Lindenwood University pole-vaulter Mark Aschen has organized an officially sanctioned competition—the Pole Vault Explosion—that takes place right in the midst of the Independence Day hoopla. —B.K.

**Wow. Live pole-vaulting in the park, huh?** Oh yes. What sets this apart is I've built a raised wooden runway right in the middle of the Riverfest. There are two huge pole-vaulting mats in the middle of the park. The crowd is able to get really close and see guys and girls going 19 feet in the air with the aid of a big fiberglass stick.

**Are there many competitors?** Last year we had 75 high school and collegiate pole-vaulters from all over the country. We've also had five or six Olympic pole-vaulters, including the American record holder, Jeff Hartwig. He's from the St. Charles area.

**What's it like to watch pole-vaulting for the first time?** When you're standing there, and you see these strong guys and girls

flying two stories into the air, it's exciting. For comparison, a basketball rim is only 10 feet up.

**What's it like to do?** The best feeling is to get all the way up there, and it's like you're floating, and then you see the bar under you, and you start to fall, and the bar is still holding. It's like scoring a touchdown every time you make it. It's an incredible feeling.

**Is there a danger that the pole can break? We don't want any accidents worthy of YouTube, right?** If you Google "Pole Vault Explosion," you'll see a video of a good friend of mine at PVE. He ran down the runway, and his pole became completely bent, and then it broke into two pieces. When the pole breaks, it sounds like a shotgun, and it makes your heart stop. But in 10 years of pole-vaulting, I've never been injured.

**Who was the first pole-vaulter? Some guy trying to cross a stream a couple thousand years ago?** The speculation is that someone was trying to get over a castle moat in medieval times.

**If he missed, he might land in the moat and get eaten by crocodiles.** Yeah. I definitely wouldn't have become a pole-vaulter at that time.



PHOTOGRAPH BY JEN HENGST

## Soldier On

A native son plays shoot-'em-up in a new miniseries from the creators of *The Wire*



Eric Nenner has made a career out of playing the heavy. From his first role in a preschool nativity play, as "the innkeeper that told Mary and Joseph to keep it movin'," to roles as sarcastic jock Scotty Braddock in high school horror flick *Jeepers Creepers II* and Cadet Eric Hansen on TV's *Malcolm in the Middle*, the classically trained actor has seen his share of tough-guy action.

His latest turn is similarly macho. The 29-year-old Ladue High School grad snared a key role in *Generation Kill*, a seven-part *Band of Brothers*-style miniseries premiering this month on HBO. Based on a book by *Rolling Stone* reporter Evan Wright, it tells the story of the video game-obsessed boy-Marines who led the U.S. military's push into Iraq in 2003.

Nenner's character, Captain America (the nickname of real-life Capt. David McGraw), is "a big overzealous,

excitable guy. He would basically charge right in," says the actor, describing a scene the series reenacts where the men storm what turns out to be an abandoned airfield in Humvees—and ultimately question their leader's sanity.

After wrapping the six-month shoot in the South African desert, Nenner returned home to L.A. for some downtime with his wife and son. He's planning to return to his true home this month, though, to take in a Cubs-Cards game and visit longtime friends Rob Fulstone (a.k.a. D.J. Crucial) and Roo Yawitz, part owner of the Gramophone.

What won't be on the agenda? A beer-pong face-off with Yawitz: "When I went away to establish a family, cultivate a career in the arts, he stayed here and honed his beer-pong skills," Nenner quips. "He would pretty much destroy me."

—Margaret Bauer