

Saddle River family 'leaps' to celebrate day: Archived Article From
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2012, 10:16 AM: [northjersey.com/community-
news/saddle-river-family-leaps-to-celebrate-day-1.209075/](http://northjersey.com/community-news/saddle-river-family-leaps-to-celebrate-day-1.209075/)

Having a birthday on the calendar's rarest day is special to Saddle River resident Michelle Birnbaum. Being able to share the same birthday with her daughter, Rose, who will turn 4 that day, is more than just icing on the cake.

Because the earth takes about 365.24219 days to revolve around the sun, the calendar gets an extra day this year, according to leapyearday.com, a website dedicated to people born on leap day. This year about 684 out of every million people on the planet will celebrate their birthday on Feb. 29.

"For Rose, I don't know if she realizes it yet and understands the whole concept of leap year and the calendar system meeting up with the solar system and how there's a fourth of a day extra each year and that's why they add [a day]," her mother said. "I don't think she understands it, but I think she's excited to have the same birthday as me."

The extra 24 hours was originally added to February every four years by Roman Emperor Julius Caesar in 45 B.C.E. so the seasons would continue to occur at the same time, but it wasn't a perfect solution.

In 1582, when Pope Gregory XIII invented the Gregorian calendar, he attempted to correct the issue by dropping the extra day on century years that aren't evenly divisible by 400.

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A special day

Rose, a Wandell pre-school student, loves going to school, playing with her dolls, dancing and reading, said Michelle Birnbaum, who was born on Leap Day in 1980.

Rose's favorite book is Kay Thompson's "Eloise at the Plaza," and her parents are taking her to The Eloise Suite at the Plaza Hotel in New York City for two nights to celebrate as part of a week-long vacation, said her father Jaeson Birnbaum, a former practicing lawyer who founded Saddle River Funding Corp. They also plan to see the play "Mary Poppins" and go to the American Girl Doll store.

Rose and her 14-month-old sister, Violet, are also going to sort through their unopened toys from the holidays and gently used toys and donate them to children living at Shelter Our Sisters, a domestic violence shelter in Bergen county, said Michelle Birnbaum, who works as a court appointed law guardian in New Jersey, and represents children who are abused and neglected.

Her pre-school teacher, Mrs. Cavanagh said the class always celebrates children's birthdays, but the fact that it falls on leap year will make it even more "special."

"I think it's really kind of cool actually, and it's fun," said Cavanagh. She plans to read a book to the students that related to leap day birthdays, and why on three out of four years the day is not on the calendar.

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"They're actually the first people I've ever met that had their birthdays on leap day," Cavanagh said, who has been teaching for six years. "It's nice for our class because it's a special day and then it will be a special day because it's Rose's birthday also."

For the mother and daughter, born 2/29/80 and 2/29/08, numerical coincidences don't stop with just being born on the same day, Michelle Birnbaum pointed out.

"It's all the same number. It's just the end that's reversed," she said. "That's really cool."

What are the odds?

A child-bearing woman that was born on a leap year has about a 1 in 1,641 chance of having a child born on a leap year, ignoring differences in actual births on given days.

The odds are "about" that number because years are actually estimated to be around 365 days 5 hours 48 minutes 45.19 seconds or 31,556,925.445 seconds, according to the International Union of Geological Sciences.

The odds of a random pair of people being born on a leap day is one in more than 2 million, and the odds of a mother and daughter sharing a leap year birthday are even more astronomical.

"I was shocked," said Jaeson Birnbaum. "It's like one in millions that this would ever happen."

He said it made him feel like they were even more special and that his daughter was "a gift for us."