“It’s kind of fun,” said Logan Tharp, referring to the anticipation of his upcoming birthday. This HHS sophomore will be celebrating his fourth birthday next week.

Please don’t jump to conclusions. This 10th-grader is actually on the brink of turning 16, but since his unique birthday only comes around every four years, Tharp can simply laugh when he tells people he’ll only be 4 years old next Wednesday.

Tharp is a leap year baby, born Feb. 29, 1996. He will end up with fewer birthday anniversaries than his age in years.

“I used to hate it in elementary school,” he said, remembering how the kids would tease him about being only 2 or 3 years old. Now he finds the fun in it, joking around with the little kids who actually believe him when he says he’s only 3 years old.

Tharp usually celebrates his birthday on Feb. 28, but he said he couldn’t get his driving permit until March 1 last year, because they told him he wasn’t a full 15 years old yet.

This year he’ll be able to get his license on March 1, but the thing he’d really like to be doing is preparing for a regional basketball game on his birthday.

Leap year baby Logan Tharp is pictured eight years ago at a district basketball game on his second official birthday. This 16-year-old is excited to celebrate his fourth birthday next Wednesday, Feb. 29.

—Enterprise file photo

Leap days occur in most years that are divisible by four, like 2008, 2012 and 2016. The exception is that years divisible by 100 don't get a leap day unless they are evenly divisible by 400. For example, the year 1900 didn't have a leap day, but the years 1600 and 2000 did.

Even though most calendar years contain 365 days, the actual number of days it takes the earth to revolve around the sun is 365.2425. That's 365 days, five hours, 49 minutes and 12 seconds!

To compensate for this and keep the calendar year synchronized with the astronomical year, an extra 24-hour day (Feb. 29) is included every four years in the Gregorian calendar. Since it's slightly inaccurate to add an extra six hours every year, the end-of-the-century years don't have a leap day unless they are divisible by 400. A year that is not a leap year is called a common year.

The percent of the population born on leap day is 0.274 percent. Over 4.7 million people worldwide are leaplings, or leap year babies, with birthdays on Feb. 29. Around 10,800 babies are born in the United States on leap day.

A long-standing tradition in the British Isles is that women may only propose marriage to a man on leap day. Compensation for a refusal ranged from a silk gown to a kiss.

On the other hand, however, marriage in a leap year is considered unlucky in Greece and will be avoided by many couples.

Many famous people have been born on leap day, and Gilbert and Sullivan's 1879 comic opera The Pirates of Penzance brought even more popularity to the special birthday. In this opera, the pirate apprentice learns, to his dismay, that he's bound to serve the pirates until his 21st birthday rather than until his 21st year.

Now the question is: What will everyone do next week with their extra special, extra day in February?

Holyoke Enterprise February 23, 2012