



# BELLEVILLE NEWS-DEMOCRAT

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## Parents are baffled why daughter was killed

Body positively identified

BY CAROLYN P. SMITH  
csmith@bnd.com

EAST ST. LOUIS — The family of a 25-year-old Wisconsin woman found dead last month in East St. Louis traveled Friday to Illinois to positively identify the body.

Too upset to talk to reporters, detectives walked the mother, father and a family friend of Rebecka Braenne straight to the detectives' bureau at the police station, where they remained in seclusion until they left later in the day.



Rick Braenne said in a telephone interview Thursday that he didn't know why his daughter was in East St. Louis. And it was even more baffling to him why anyone would want to kill her.

While he wrestled with his emotions, Rick Braenne said he was glad to finally know where his daughter was and what happened to her. But he won't have real closure until the person responsible for her death is captured and brought to justice.

"We want the police to do their job and find the person who did this," he said.

Braenne's body was found Sept. 11 in the 1000 block of Hickory Avenue, near the Black Bridge. She had been shot multiple times, including once in the head.

Police worked lead after lead and still could not identify Braenne until Marathon County sheriff's department Detective Sean McCarthy, while reading newspaper stories online, came across a Jane Doe story in East St. Louis. After a phone conversation with East St. Louis Detective Jay Cobb, McCarthy faxed a copy of

Please see DAUGHTER, A2

## Big Mama's barbecue buys Teen Center

Will add dining room, parking

BY SCOTT WUERZ  
swuerz@bnd.com

BELLEVILLE — The Belleville Teen Center is moving out, and Big Mama is moving in.

Operators of Big Mama's Barbecue, 5110 North Belt West, have purchased the Belleville Teen Center building just west of their original location and plan to expand their dining room, parking and their menu.

"We've outgrown the space we have only two years after we opened," said Laurie Shannon, a part-owner of the business. "We're shooting for a mid-February opening at the new place."

The Teen Center building needs a lot of renovation, Shannon said. But she thinks it eventually will be a perfect site because of its previous incarnation as a restaurant.

"It's pretty banged up in there because of the kids," Shannon said. "But it has a big banquet room and the space we need."

For most of the 1980s, the Teen Center building at 5500 North Belt West housed Walton's restaurant. The restaurant moved out in August 1989 when the Walton family said that it no longer met their needs. The Western-looking, wood-paneled building housed a nightclub and a bar after Walton's moved out

Please see CENTER, A2

## BURSTING THE BUBBLE



BILL DEMESTRI/News-Democrat

Workers rode a motorized hoist, left, as they took apart the gas storage tank south of Freeburg.



"I guess it will improve my view when it's gone. But it probably won't help my business. I always told people, 'When you get to the giant green ball, you've found me.'"

Lil Helfrich  
A1 Bait and Tackle operator

## Workers dismantle storage tank

BY SCOTT WUERZ  
swuerz@bnd.com

Drivers motoring north on Illinois 13 probably can't tell one cornfield from another as they head toward Belleville from Southern Illinois.

But three miles south of Freeburg, drivers couldn't help but take notice as the flat landscape suddenly gave way to a giant green sphere that some say looked like an oversized hot-air balloon without a gondola, the world's largest Jiffy Pop popcorn maker, an alien spacecraft or a great green pea.

Everybody has their theories about the function of the 60-foot diameter structure, which is just a couple hundred yards from the road, Illinois Power spokesman Rich Conner said. But, really, it's just a great big

propane tank.

At least it was. Workers this week began to dismantle the odd landmark.

"That's been there as long as I can remember," said Lil Helfrich, who has lived and operated A1 Bait and Tackle just across the highway from the sphere for the past 32 years. "I guess it will improve my view when it's gone. But it probably won't help my business. I always told people, 'When you get to the giant green ball, you've found me.'"

While it hasn't been much to look at over the years, Helfrich said it never worried her to live just across the road from a giant steel ball filled with explosive gas.

"Once it was hit by lightning, and the top caught on fire," Helfrich said. "I guess that happened about 18 years

Please see BUBBLE, A2

## Mandatory community service sounds good in theory

High-school program likely difficult to run

BY DANIELLE MCNAMARA  
Belleville News-Democrat

A requirement Gov. Rod Blagojevich is considering that would make community service necessary to graduate from high school sounds like a good idea in theory, but would be difficult to administer, guidance counselors, students and community workers said Friday.

The idea would extend legislation he introduced that adds a 50-hour minimum community service requirement for students to be eligible for the Illinois Merit Recognition Scholarship. Currently, the scholarship is awarded on academic achievement only.

The governor said volunteering at a local library, hospital or senior center is necessary because it gives young people values.

(Values) "give us direction, they teach us how to live our lives," the governor stated in a news release.

But one local school official said the cost to administer mandatory community service is not possible during current budget constraints.

"It's good for kids to volunteer," said Brent Clark, Belleville Township High School District 201 superintendent. "I have this

Please see SERVICE, A2



BRIAN BACA/News-Democrat

O'Fallon senior Kevin Mercurio suggested that each school should determine its own level of community-involvement requirements.

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LOTTERY FOR ILLINOIS

- Pick Three-Midday: 0-5-5
- Pick Three-Evening: 8-8-3
- Pick Four-Midday: 3-9-1-6

- Pick Four-Evening: 6-7-8-7
- Little Lotto: 02-04-10-13-20
- Jackpot: \$2.5 million

FOR MISSOURI

- Daily Pick 3: 3-8-4
- Daily Pick 4: 5-4-8-9
- Show Me 5: 16-18-37-38-39

MEGA MILLIONS Game: 4-19-36-42-48

Mega Ball: 13

Jackpot: \$10 million

