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Election judge has vote fraud hearing

Three dead relatives 'voted' in Precinct 26

By MIKE FITZGERALD
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EAST ST. LOUIS — Nearly a year ago, Vincent Pensoneau of East St. Louis did something truly incredible. So did his relatives, Albert and Alferetta Pensoneau.

On Nov. 5, 2002, the three Pensoneaus cast ballots in the general election out of Precinct 26 in East St. Louis.

Trouble is, all three were dead at the time.

Which helps explain why Leander Brooks, 39, a Precinct 26 election judge, was arraigned Friday before a federal magistrate judge on four counts of vote fraud.

Brooks, whose last known address is 801 N. 82nd St. in East St. Louis, pleaded innocent to charges that he and unnamed co-conspirators fraudulently filled out ballot applications for the three Pensoneaus and 17 other St. Clair County residents, then forged their signatures on the ballot applications.

Brooks' arraignment followed a federal grand jury's decision to indict him Wednesday — the first person in decades to be indicted on federal voter fraud charges in the metro-east. The grand jury reached its decision after prosecutors began presenting evidence in December.

The federal indictment of Brooks is noteworthy because vote fraud cases traditionally are referred to the St. Clair County state's attorney's office.

Brooks is a first cousin of Michael Collins, Precinct 26's longtime Democratic committeeman and a former East St. Louis City Council member.

In February 2001, a jury convicted Collins on four state felony charges of illegally registering voters nearly six years earlier. A judge later sentenced him to 18 months of probation and community service. The felony convictions, however, didn't stop Precinct 26 voters from re-electing Collins as their Democratic committeeman in 2002.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Gerald Cohn on Friday ordered that Brooks be held at the St. Clair County Jail without bail pending the outcome of a detention hearing which will probably be held next week.

Please see FRAUD, A2



'I'M NOT SCARED OF ANYTHING ANYMORE'



TIM VIZER/News-Democrat

From left, Cindi Panzau, Sarah and Sarah's twin sister, Nicole Panzau, share an upbeat outlook.

Injured former volleyball star slowly recovers

By SCOTT WUERZ
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Sarah Panzau was worried about how she looked Friday afternoon.

"I didn't know there were going to be pictures," the 22-year-old former Belleville West and Belleville Area College volleyball star told a reporter and photographer at her home just west of Belleville as she messed with her hair and made sure her jacket was straight. "I know it sounds bad. But I'm worried about how I look."

Sarah's mom, Cindi Panzau, said there was no reassuring her daughter on the issue of her appearance. But

INSIDE: Blood drive is dedicated to Panzau. PAGE A2

too worried about whether Sarah would live or die to think about a trivial thing like appearance.

Sarah lost her left arm between the elbow and shoulder when she was pitched from her Saturn coupe just before 4:30 a.m. Aug. 23 in a single-car accident. Her jaw was broken in seven places. Her ribs and shoulder blade were broken. The skin was

ripped from the back of her head and neck. The list of injuries went on and on.

Paramedics on the scene initially thought the 5-foot-10 brunette was dead. She was breathing only about three times a minute, they discovered, and the fact that her numerous wounds weren't bleeding indicated that she had virtually no blood pressure.

"I've gotten to know one of the paramedics who worked on her," Sarah's twin sister, Nicole Panzau,

Please see STAR, A2

Teenager held in Cahokia stabbings

Both victims survive attack

By CAROLYN P. SMITH
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CAHOKIA — Police were holding a 15-year-old boy after his older brother and mother's boyfriend were stabbed just after midnight Friday.

Cahokia Police Lt. Norm Venable said police would be seeking charges against the teen through the St. Clair County state's attorney's office. His name was not released because of his age.

Police were called at 12:14 a.m. Friday to the 100 block of St. James Street in Cahokia. When they arrived, they found two bloody people.

Venable said he believed the juvenile was stabbed in his stomach. The mother's boyfriend was stabbed in the neck and head.

The stabbing was the result of an argument conducted inside and outside the house, Venable said.

The victims, whose identities police did not release, were taken to St. Mary's Hospital in East St. Louis where they remained Friday. A condition report was not available.

The boy's mother was at home at the time of the stabbing. It was not clear Friday what led to the argument.

Please see STABBINGS, A2

Party chairman's wife to become county auditor

She replaces man put in state post

By GEORGE PAWLACZYK
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BELLEVILLE — Patty Sprague, wife of St. Clair County Democratic Chairman Robert Sprague, will be named Monday as county auditor to replace John Driscoll who resigned last month.

Driscoll, 63, was hired Oct. 1 as a \$59,568 per year land acquisition agent for the Department of Natural Resources in Springfield. He was paid \$73,898 as auditor.

Driscoll, of Fairview Heights, is the fourth politically connected St. Clair County Democrat to receive a state job since Democratic Gov. Rod Blagojevich took office and announced a general state hiring freeze. Driscoll could not be reached for comment Friday.

"Patty has been a very capable elected member of the (county) Board of Review," said County Board Chairman John Baricevic, who selected Sprague as the nominee. She must be confirmed

Please see AUDITOR, A2

"We're striking to get them back to the table."

Steve Woodward, union leader

Teachers strike forces Freeburg elementary, junior high schools to close

By TANIA E. LOPEZ
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There will be no school Monday for 825 Freeburg elementary and junior high students as District 70 teachers begin their strike.

Freeburg Community Consolidated School teachers voted Wednesday to reject a contract pro-

posal.

Steve Woodward, president of the Freeburg Elementary Teacher's Association, said the union is willing to set up another meeting with the federal mediator to discuss the contract.

"I would hope that we can get something moving," he said. "We're striking to get them back to the table."

Freeburg Superintendent Rob Hawkins said no date has been set with negotiators, but a school board meeting is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Monday in the school library. He said the contract will be on the agenda.

The teachers voted to strike Wednesday night after rejecting a proposed three-year contract the

Freeburg school board presented to them as a final offer through a federal mediator.

The proposal included a requirement that each teacher cover the difference of any increase in health insurance premium of more than 10 percent.

Freeburg teachers had held off striking despite passing a 10-day

strike notice Sept. 24.

According to the 2002 Illinois school report cards, the average elementary teacher salary in Freeburg is \$43,380 and there are 41 teachers working in the district.

Hawkins said parents can keep track of the strike by calling 539-3188, Ext. 888, where there will be updated messages.

INDEX

A SECTION

- A3 News to Use
- A4 Opinion
- A5 Nation/World
- A10 The Back Page

B LOCAL NEWS

- B2 Obituaries
- B4 Local Flashes
- B5 Business
- B6 Stocks

C LIFESTYLE

- C2 Dear Abby
- C3 TV, Movies
- C4 Comics
- C4 Crossword

D SPORTS

- D2 Local sports
- D4 Scoreboard
- D6 NFL
- D6 College football

E CLASSIFIED

LOTTERY FOR ILLINOIS

- Pick Three-Midday: 3-3-8
- Pick Three-Evening: 8-8-8
- Pick Four-Midday: 5-2-1-9
- Pick Four-Evening: 8-3-5-6
- Little Lotto: 05-15-17-25-27
- Jackpot: \$4.5 million

MEGA MILLIONS Game 8-9-16-30-31

Mega Ball: 15

FOR MISSOURI

- Daily Pick 3: 4-2-9
- Daily Pick 4: 5-5-6-5
- Show Me 5: 1-23-29-30-32

Jackpot: \$28 million

