

# BELLEVILLE NEWS-DEMOCRAT

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## Wedding ring stirs up doubt

Woman had a ring of her own stolen

BY BETH HUNDSORFER  
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When convicted felon Kye Kim received permission from a federal judge to travel to South Korea to marry his fiancée, he probably had a ring in his pocket.

But Debra Severs wonders whether Kim actually bought a ring, or whether the ring he intended to put around the finger of his bride had a more dubious origin.

Severs has reason to doubt him.

In January 2002, Swansea Police investigated Kim for stealing Severs' \$23,000 wedding ring. She later found it in an O'Fallon pawn shop and no longer takes it off.

Severs employed Kim as a subcontractor to install ceramic tile in the bathroom of her Swansea home. On Jan. 8, 2002, Severs removed her jewelry after taking a shower.

After Kim left for the day, she noticed the ring was missing and called police.

Police questioned Kim, but according to a report by Swansea Police, Kim called his attorney, James Gomric, who advised him not to answer any questions.

Kim allowed the officer to search his vehicle, but the search failed to turn up the ring.

Severs didn't forget. She began haunting local pawn shops looking for her ring.

"It was a very unusual ring. My husband is a jeweler and it was custom-made," she said.

Five months later, Severs found her ring in an O'Fallon pawn shop. The shop was in a shopping mall that belonged to Kim's father.

Dewinder Singh, owner of Pannu's Gifts and Jewelry in Southview Plaza, said Kim came into his store with the ring and asked to pawn it so he could get cash to pay a divorce attorney, the police report stated.

Kim received \$5,000 for the ring, Singh told police.

Swansea Police had everything they needed to charge Kim with theft over \$300 — a felony that carries a prison term of up to five years.

Severs declined to prosecute Kim because police would have to keep her ring for evidence until the prosecutors resolved the case.

"After everything I'd been through, I just wanted it back,"

Please see RING, A2

**FOCUS:** The desire for the high that only opiates can give has turned a prescription painkiller into the illicit drug of choice for many Americans.

## HILLBILLY HEROIN



MIKE FITZGERALD/News-Democrat

Jon Riley Hays, shown here in May 2002, is serving time at a federal prison.

BY MIKE FITZGERALD  
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Only an addict can describe the euphoria that comes from that first outlaw hit of OxyContin.

Only an addict can describe the sheer torture of trying to quit the narcotic painkiller known as "Hillbilly Heroin."

Jon Riley Hays, M.D., knows about both.

Hays, formerly a family practice physician in the Southern Illinois town of Herrin, first took OxyContin three years ago when a pa-

tient turned in a bottle containing some leftover pills.

Hays, 42, at the time had been suffering excruciating back pain from a car accident, preventing a decent night of sleep. The much weaker painkillers he had been given weren't doing the trick.

Hays knew that ingesting the OxyContin was wrong. But he also believed the claims of sales representatives that OxyContin is safe and nonaddictive.

Within a few minutes of consuming that first OxyContin tablet, Hays said, "I felt like Superman. I could work all day, be happy, go home,

**INSIDE:** Facts about OxyContin. **PAGE A7** play with the kids. Do everything that I wanted to do.... I just felt like a million bucks."

The addiction advanced rapidly. Within six weeks, he was stealing OxyContin from patients, crushing up the pills to mix in a saline solution, loading it into a hypodermic needle and plunging it into his arm. He also bought OxyContin from local pharmacies under false names.

Terrified of what he had fallen into, Hays tried to wean

Please see FOCUS, A7

## Suicide called improbable in shooting

Report not given to coroner's jury

BY GEORGE PAWLACZYK  
AND BETH HUNDSORFER  
Belleville News-Democrat



Stark

BELLEVILLE — The pathologist who performed the autopsy on Danny Stark said it was "almost impossible" the 22-year-old shot himself in the head then walked 80 feet to where his body was found.

But a coroner's jury that ruled Stark's death a suicide never saw the report that contained the pathologist's opinion.

St. Clair County Coroner Rick Stone said the omission of the two-page report by deputy coroner Robert Shay during the coroner's inquest was an "oversight."

Shay attended the autopsy and reported that after pathologist Raj Nanduri traced the path of the .38-caliber pistol slug through Stark's brain,

Nanduri said: "It would be almost impossible for someone to sustain such an injury, then open the truck door and walk to the area" where the body was found.

Nanduri called the cause of death "undetermined," but that finding was never revealed to jurors.

"How could (that report) not be in there? What are they running up there?" said Stark's mother, Sherry Stark. Like Stark's father, Dan Stark, and other family members and friends, Sherry Stark has refused to accept the official ruling of suicide in her son's death.

Stone said Friday that as a result of the omitted report in the Stark case, he will "add witnesses if the situation warrants."

The new policy could have

Please see SUICIDE, A2

## Private sector gains role in water service

Cities seek help with fiscal woes

BY PATRICK J. POWERS  
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Struggling to cope with the rising costs of an aging system, the village of Shiloh sold its water system five years ago to the utility giant Illinois-American Water Co.

The village was glad to get out of the business. The village was facing \$350,000 a year in overhead and \$50,000 in annual debt payments.

"Utilities require a lot of upkeep in order to keep them running," Village Clerk Brenda Kern said. "As far as I'm aware, Illinois-American's been good to work with."

In return for the profits generated from the operation of Shiloh's water system, the water company agreed to freeze rates for five years and

offer around-the-clock customer service — two promises that village leaders couldn't have made themselves.

The sale of the water system mirrored a nationwide trend of privatizing public water companies that continues today. Other than a handful of cities across the state — including Peoria, Kankakee and Belleville — most municipalities own and operate their own water utilities.

However, when facing increasing regulatory health standards and deteriorating infrastructure, communities begin to look for a way out. The utility conglomerates are more than willing to pick up the slack.

The problem is that consumers are normally the ones who end up paying the cost in the form of higher water rates

Please see WATER, A2

## Asphalt plant's neighbors in Lebanon say they have no beef with it

Proposal to move near Troy faces opposition

BY JENNIFER KAPILANI SAXTON  
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Folks in Troy are worried that an asphalt plant planning a move to town will be a bad neighbor, but the plant's current neighbors said there is little to worry about.

On Sept. 17, the Madison Coun-

ty Board will vote on a request by Christ Brothers Asphalt to rezone 35 acres in unincorporated Madison County, just outside of Troy. Troy city leaders are against the move.

Currently the Christ Brothers Asphalt plant is on Southern Drive in Lebanon. Neighbors said they have never had a problem with the plant.

Since the asphalt plant moved in

a couple years ago next to Melvin Tucker of 400 McAllister St. in Lebanon, he hasn't smelled a thing.

"I have never smelled anything or ever had any problems with them. I can hear their trucks in the morning sometimes, but I also have a train right behind my house so I hear that, too," said Tucker, who has lived in Lebanon since 1969.

Thomas Winters of 312 McAllister St. has only lived in Lebanon for

two months, but never smelled the plant.

At Buhl's Auto Repair, 509 McAllister St., mechanic Joe Epplin said the shop already has a lot of smells going through it with all the cars. He also has no problem with the asphalt plant.

"I've heard a truck every now and then and no smells that I would complain about," Epplin said.

One neighbor would be happy to

see them leave.

Lebanon native and lawyer Willis Mog has an organic gardening business at 434 Southern Drive, across from Christ Brothers.

"If the wind's blowing in my direction, it blows everything from the asphalt plant onto my property," Mog said. "I wish Troy would accept their proposal to get them

Please see ASPHALT, A2

"I have done everything in my power to provide a quality life in the city of Troy..."

Troy Mayor Tom Caraker

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**LOTTERY FOR ILLINOIS**

- Pick Three-Midday: **9-2-3**
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- Pick Four-Midday: **3-5-1-7**
- Pick Four-Evening: **5-8-9-0**
- Lotto: **18-22-25-32-39-47**
- Jackpot: **\$5.5 million**

**POWERBALL: 06-15-18-20-41** Powerball: **17** Jackpot: **\$13.7 million** Power Play: **05**

**FOR MISSOURI**

- Daily Pick 3: **4-7-5**
- Daily Pick 4: **1-3-9-8**
- Show Me 5: **4-5-17-19-37**
- Lotto: **3-5-9-13-15-30**

