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ZIA NIZAMI/News-Democrat

Doraliza Perez, 60, appears overwhelmed by her daughter's plight as she stands in the kitchen of her Fairmont City home.

SHATTERED DREAMS

Immigrant living legally in U.S. for 28 years faces deportation because of minor drug crime

BY MIKE FITZGERALD
mfitzgerald@bnd.com

It took Maria I. Perez about 30 minutes to make a decision that could end up changing her life forever.

On Jan. 14, 2003, a Collinsville Police officer arrested Perez for driving on a suspended driver's license. Later that day, at the police station-house, a police officer found a plastic bag containing residue of crack cocaine after a search of Perez' sweater. Perez denied the drugs were hers.

Two months later, Perez, 42, met for about half an hour with her lawyer at the Madison County Courthouse in Edwardsville.

The lawyer advised her to plead guilty. Doing so made sense, he told her, because as a first-time offender, Perez would avoid jail and receive probation, Perez said.

"He said, 'Everything's been taken care of,'" recalled Perez. "It was kind of weird when he told me to plead guilty. It happened so quick."

But Perez's guilty plea pushed into motion a series of events that could wind up costing the Collinsville woman her home and family.

Today, because of that plea, Perez finds herself behind bars in a rural Missouri jail, waiting to be deported.

Perez, who has been in this country nearly three decades, is



ZIA NIZAMI/News-Democrat

Maria Canady, 14, holds a picture of her mother, Maria Perez, who is in custody in the Mississippi County Detention Center in Charleston, Mo.

a permanent legal resident but not a U.S. citizen. That distinction was enough for a federal immigration judge, who late last month ordered her deported back to her native Chile.

"I don't know why this is happening to me," said Perez, whom federal agents handcuffed and whisked off to jail after she had completed her probation early in September 2004. "I was doing

INSIDE: Thousands of legal residents convicted of felonies face deportations every year. PAGE A7

everything the way I should've done it."

The deportation order occurred late last month, nearly two years after Perez pleaded guilty to a felony charge of drug possession.

Perez said she was unaware of tough federal laws, passed in 1996, that require the automatic removal of noncitizen immigrants convicted of "aggravated felonies," even though the crime Perez pleaded guilty to was minor enough to qualify her for automatic probation in state court.

Perez faces the prospect of permanent exile from the United States. The removal order would send her back to Chile, whose military dictatorship she fled as a teen-ager with her family in 1976.

Perez is fighting to remain in the United States. Her best hope resides in her new attorney's campaign to get her drug conviction thrown out. A hearing on her motion is scheduled before Associate Judge James Hackett at 1:30 p.m. Tuesday in Madison County Circuit Court.

If Hackett finds in favor of Perez, then her guilty plea will be erased. This would provide the legal doorway that attorney

Please see DREAMS, A7

Hubbard fires 30 auxiliary police officers

All officers being reviewed

BY CAROLYN P. SMITH
News-Democrat

EAST ST. LOUIS — Acting Police Chief Marion Hubbard told reporters Saturday that 30 of 58 auxiliary police officers have been purged from the force in the wake of background checks.

The auxiliary officers have been ordered to turn in their badges, shields and identification cards.

Background checks also are being conducted on the department's 65 regular police officers to ensure all have high school diplomas or general equivalency diplomas and no criminal offenses or major misdemeanors in their background, Hubbard said.

The Illinois State Police and St. Clair County sheriff's department are conducting separate checks. Federal checks as well as online database checks in Missouri are underway, using the Law Enforcement Assistance Data System. Hubbard said generally police departments as a courtesy do not charge for the checks.

He said any auxiliary officer or police officer found to have a questionable record will be removed.

Hubbard said the past chiefs, Delbert Marion and Ronald Matthews, were responsible for the

Please see AUXILIARY, A2

Police, family at odds over fatal shooting

Disputed crime happened in 2001

BY GEORGE PAWLACZYK
News-Democrat

EAST ST. LOUIS — Detective Marion Riddle said he's willing to resubmit his investigation into the 2001 shooting death of John K. Hill to a prosecutor if the victim's family will provide names of additional witnesses.

But family members say it's not their job to investigate. They claim Riddle has been stalling all along because a suspect named in a police report — who was arrested but never charged — is a first cousin of an East St. Louis Police officer.

A police report states the suspect was working as a security guard at Club Casino, 6830 State St. in East St. Louis, where Hill had spent several hours before he was shot. The suspect's police-officer cousin was also listed as a witness.

"Of course we'll help all we can. We've always been willing to help," said Cynthia Hill of Florissant, Mo., the victim's aunt, who along with his mother, Carolyn Hill of St. Louis, has steadily pushed for an arrest.

Riddle said he still has two eyewitness statements he believes may be enough for an indictment.

Please see SHOOTING A2



This is the first in an occasional series about unsolved homicides in East St. Louis.

Old e-mail may have impact on wrongful death lawsuit

BY BETH HUNDSORFER
News-Democrat

When his teenage daughter died in a fiery crash after hitting a utility pole in February 2001, Illinois Power utility operations supervisor Tom Lucash wanted answers.

It took nearly four years, a reluctant whistleblower and a bitter wrongful death lawsuit.

Now, a judge will penalize the company for withholding a crucial internal e-mail when the lawsuit goes to trial Feb. 28.

On Feb. 18, 2001, Lucash's daughter Sarah and her boyfriend, Kyle Johnson, died when the Chevrolet Cavalier left the road at 3200 Smelting Works Road near Swansea, and struck a utility pole.

Johnson, 17, of Belleville, was thrown from the car and electrocuted by the downed electrical lines.

Sarah Lucash, 18, of O'Fallon, was trapped in the car when fuel vapors ignited. She died from third- and fourth-degree burns.

The Lucash and Johnson families filed a wrongful death lawsuit in

Please see E-MAIL, A2

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LOTTERY FOR ILLINOIS

- Pick 4-Evening: 9-9-9-2
- Pick 3-Midday: 8-1-8
- Pick 3-Evening: 7-4-2
- Pick 4-Midday: 1-0-9-5
- Little Lotto: 22-28-32-33-35
- Lotto: 07-09-18-32-40-43
- Jackpot: \$16.5 million

POWERBALL: Game: 18-21-28-49-50 Powerball: 16

FOR MISSOURI

- Pick 3-Midday: 7-9-0
- Evening: 0-4-8
- Pick 4-Midday: 6-1-3-8
- Evening: 6-2-4-6
- Show Me 5-Midday: 7-13-16-32-40
- Show Me 5-Evening: 15-17-30-32-42
- Lotto: 6-12-25-29-30-37

Jackpot: \$40.6 million Power Play: 5

