



BELLEVILLE NEWS-DEMOCRAT

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Cause of death thought to be heat

Centreville woman dies at hospital

BY ALIANA RAMOS
News-Democrat

The first possible St. Clair County heat-related death of 2005 was reported Thursday.

Harlean Jones, 48, from Centreville, was brought into Kenneth Hall Regional Hospital in East St. Louis about 6:30 a.m. Thursday, officials said.

Her temperature was 108, said St. Clair County Deputy Coroner Al Ransom.

Ransom said that according to the doctor in the emergency room, Jones' death was heat-related.

Dale Bechtold with the National Weather Service said a heat advisory was in effect for both Wednesday and Thursday. The temperatures in St. Clair County reached 99 on Wednesday. The heat advisory ended at 6 p.m. Thursday.

An autopsy was not performed Thursday. "I don't think there's going to be one, because of what we already know," Ran-

Please see HEAT, A2

Water usage restrictions lifted for now

BY LISA P. WHITE
News-Democrat

Nearly a week after Illinois American Water asked residents of Belleville, Swansea and Shiloh to voluntarily conserve water, the company lifted the restrictions Thursday.

That means people may again give their lawns a cool drink of water — guilt-free.

But the water company asks customers to please be smart about it.

"If you're going to water the lawn, certainly don't do it during the heat of the day because so much of that water tends to evaporate," said Illinois American General Manager Fred Ruckman.

Please see WATER, A2



Coming Saturday

Are you a laid-back person with a Type A cat? A Purina expert talks about the different personalities of cats and how to choose a pet. In Lifestyle.



News-Democrat file photo

In this photo from 2001, Randy Battas, an employee at Belleville Shoe Manufacturing Co., makes one of many pairs of boots for military use. Because of contracts ending, the company will lay off 40 percent of its employees.

Shoe plant will downsize

Belleville Shoe to cut 40 percent of its work force

BY JENNIFER A. BOWEN
News-Democrat

On Aug. 29, many of the Belleville Shoe Manufacturing Co.'s 260 employees will be looking for new jobs.

Employees of the company received a letter Wednesday, detailing the impending layoffs of nearly 40 percent of the company's work force.

"A pair of large Army and Marine Corps contracts are ending," Eric Weidmann, president of Belleville Shoe Co. said of the layoffs. "These are multi-year contracts that we've been producing on for two to five years and we've reached the end of them. If the contracts come back, then laid-off employees do have recall rights under their union contract."

Employees are members of the United Food and Commer-

Belleville Shoe Manufacturing Co.

President: Eric Weidmann

Employees: 1,300, with 650 in Belleville and 650 in Arkansas. Belleville plant to lay off 260 starting Aug. 29.

Locations: Belle Valley Industrial Park, Belleville. Belleville Shoe South, DeWitt, Ark., opened in 2002.

Output: 8,000 pairs of military boots every day and more than 1 million pairs of boots annually.

Origins: Founded by Adolph Knobloch, H.E. Leunig, J.B. Reis, James Rentchler and



Weidmann

William Weidmann on Oct. 21, 1904. Started with 50 workers, who made 50 to 75 pairs of shoes a day at the former Rentchler Machine Shops at East B and Delmar streets.

Military: Oldest and largest military boot manufacturing company in the U.S. Became their primary business in 1970s. Company manufactured first pair of boots for the military in 1917 when the U.S. entered World War I. U.S. Defense Logistics Agency in March awarded the company an \$8.1 million contract to produce boots for the Army.

cial Workers Local 655 in St. Louis and entered into a new three-year contract in March.

Union president Jim Dougherty learned of the planned layoffs Thursday

morning.

"This is very disappointing, to say the least," Dougherty said. "It's not that out of the ordinary for this kind of thing to happen, but I don't remem-

ber a layoff this massive."

Employees weren't surprised about the layoff announcement.

"Everyone sort of knew this would happen, we just didn't know when," said employee Chris Krug. Krug is not on the list of laid-off employees but may have to transfer from his position as a gluer to another spot on the manufacturing line when the work force shrinks.

"A lot of people on the lay-off list already have ideas of jobs they could go to next," Krug said. "Some are talking about going to the coal mine that just opened up."

Layoffs will begin Aug. 29 and continue for two to three weeks until the work force is reduced, Weidmann said.

"It's too bad because these are some great folks who have done a great job making boots that have been important to the war effort," Weidmann said. "I'll be sorry to see them

Please see SHOE, A2

Trial date in Johnson burglary case set

Home was scene of three murders

BY BETH HUNSDORFER
News-Democrat

BELLEVILLE — The trial for a St. Louis man being held on charges of trying to kick in murder victim Michael Cooney's door has been set for Sept. 6.

St. Clair County Circuit Judge John Baricevic set the date during a pretrial hearing Thursday for Samuel L. Johnson.

Also during the hearing, Johnson asked in a motion for the judge to not allow the jury hear how he was identified.

Johnson, who Belleville Police Chief Terry Delaney has said is the only suspect in the murders of hairdresser Cooney and his two elderly female clients, asked Baricevic to bar the circumstances following an attempted break-in at Cooney's home-based hair salon on Dec. 9, 2003.

Cooney's neighbor, Steven Wis-

sehr, identified Johnson as the man who tried to kick in Cooney's door after police picked him up in front of Juanita Place.

Van-Lear Eckert, Johnson's public defender, argued in his motion filed on Thursday that

Johnson, charged with kicking in Michael Cooney's door in December. What's next: The judge on Aug. 1 will hear motions filed by Johnson for a change of venue, to have a witness disqualified, and to dismiss a charge of obstruction of justice.

Johnson, charged with kicking in Michael Cooney's door after police picked him up in front of Juanita Place.

Van-Lear Eckert, Johnson's public defender, argued in his motion filed on Thursday that

Please see BURGLARY, A2

Bank workers questioned in FBI vote-fraud probe

Democratic officials sought \$5, \$10 bills

BY GEORGE PAWLACZYK
News-Democrat

BELLEVILLE — Federal agents interviewed employees at a Belleville bank in May, concerning checks in excess of \$1,000 cashed for \$5 and \$10 bills paid to local Democratic officials just before the November election, said Republican politician Steve Reeb.

Reeb, the unsuccessful candidate for St. Clair County Board chairman in the November election, said a friend,

who is an official at Bank of America, told him in March of concerns about transactions brought to the official's attention by a cashier.

Reeb said after getting his friend's permission, he told the FBI in late March about the checks. He said agents met in May with the bank official and employees.

At the federal vote-fraud trial that concluded Wednesday with guilty verdicts against all five East St. Louis politicians, there was testimony from several witnesses about a need to pay voters \$5

Please see FRAUD, A2



CURT LIBBRA/For the News-Democrat

Gretchen Wilson received a key to the city from Pocahontas Mayor Dave Clark, right, and Village Board member Tim McKnight on Thursday at Gretchen Wilson Park.

Diamonds renamed for country star Gretchen Wilson

BY CURT LIBBRA
For the News-Democrat

POCAHONTAS — Her shoulders sank and head tilted as the music brought a blush to Gretchen Wilson's cheeks and an aw-shucks smile to her face.

"Happy birthday, dear Gretchen. Happy birthday to you," sang the crowd of about 1,000 people surrounding the Little League diamond in Pocahontas.

Wilson, who turned 32 on Sunday, returned to a hero's welcome Thursday in her hometown.

"It's nice to be sang to," said Wilson, who is used to it being the other way around.

Please see WILSON, A2

INDEX

A SECTION

A4 Opinion
A5 Nation/World
A10 People

B LOCAL NEWS

B2,4 Obituaries
B3 Regional
B5 Business
B7 Stocks

C LIFESTYLE

C2 Dear Abby
C2 Calendar
C3 TV, Movies
C10 Weather

D SPORTS NEWS

D3 Baseball
D4 Scoreboard
D6 That's Racin'

LOTTERY FOR ILLINOIS

Pick 3-Midday: **0-8-6**
Pick 3-Evening: **4-8-0**
Pick 4-Midday: **0-6-3-3**

Pick 4-Evening: **7-6-6-2**

Little Lotto: **09-15-32-34-38**

Jackpot: **\$7.5 million**

FOR MISSOURI

Pick 3-Midday: **0-7-4**; Evening: **3-0-6**
Pick 4-Midday: **4-7-3-9**; Evening: **5-8-6-7**
Show Me 5-Midday: **8-9-12-25-30**
Show Me 5-Evening: **7-15-22-28-42**

