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Deputies offer to cut wage boost to halt layoffs

County will not respond by today's 5 p.m. deadline

DETAILS OF THE UNION'S NEW PLAN

The Illinois Fraternal Order of Police is seeking a total of 7.25 percent in wage increases between Jan. 1, 2009, and the start of the coming year. Here are other terms of the union's offer:

- A 4.25 percent pay raise for the deputies beginning Jan. 1, 2012.
- No layoffs of any bargaining unit members between now and Dec. 31, 2012.
- All overtime earned between Jan. 1 and Dec. 31, 2011, shall be taken as compensatory time.

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Tell us what you think of the union's proposal.

- Read previous stories online.
- Comment on this story.

By MIKE FITZGERALD
News-Democrat

BELLEVILLE — The union that represents St. Clair County Sheriff's Department deputies has offered to cut its wage increase request by 2.25 percent over three years to avert the impending layoffs of 13 deputies.

The Illinois Fraternal Order of Police is seeking a total of 7.25 percent in wage increases between Jan. 1, 2009, and the start of the year: 3 percent for 2009; 3.25 percent in 2010; and 1 percent by Jan. 1 according to the proposal the union submitted Wednesday to Sheriff Mearl Justus and to County Board Chairman Mark Kern.

The union has given the county until 5 p.m. today to respond to its offer. The 13 deputies are scheduled to be laid off Jan. 15.

The union counteroffer compares with the 1 percent pay increase the county has offered for next year, and to the 9.5 percent hike over three years that an outside arbitrator awarded the union in November.

Rick Stewart, the union lawyer who is handling negotiations with the county, declined to discuss the union proposal.

Maj. Thomas Knapp, the department's executive deputy, declined to comment about the specifics of the counteroffer, too. However, Knapp said the county will not respond by the 5 p.m. deadline.

Stewart, however, reacted angrily to the fact the News-Democrat had obtained a copy of the union proposal.

Please see DEPUTIES, A2



Still have some shopping to do before Christmas?

Today's the last day, and columnist Suzanne Boyle can help you find the best deals. LIFESTYLE C3

It's Christmastime in the metro-east



TIM VIZER/News-Democrat

The Illinois 159 exit off Interstate 64 was backed up Thursday, mainly because of shoppers heading for the St. Clair Square shopping mall and other nearby stores.



TIM VIZER/News-Democrat

Shoppers leave St. Clair Square after picking up gifts and other items. On the national level, experts are expecting today to be a busy day because more Americans are off work Christmas Eve than usual because it falls on a Friday.

Shoppers jammed metro-east stores Thursday to do last-minute Christmas shopping and avoid the snow that's expected to fall today.

Between 2 and 4 inches of snow are expected to fall across the St. Louis area today from mid-morning until midnight, with flurries continuing to fall Christmas Day.

"It will be a fairly light snow," National Weather Service meteorologist Jon Carney said.

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Keep up with the weather at bnd.com/weather.



BE THE PERFECT HOST

You should consider sleeping on your couch before you ask your guests to do so.

LIFESTYLE C1

ALL-AREA FOOTBALL TEAM

Mater Dei quarterback Tyler Detmer leads our small-school squad. SPORTS D1

ALSO INSIDE

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TODAY'S WEATHER

Cloudy, light snow. High 32, Low 27

Marine on leave dies in accident

Man had been stationed at North Carolina base

By KEVIN BERSETT
News-Democrat

A U.S. Marine on leave from his North Carolina base was killed in a three-vehicle crash Thursday evening just east of the Poplar Street Bridge in East St. Louis, Illinois State Police Trooper Chad Thompson said.

The victim's 2006 Nissan Altima struck the rear of a tractor-trailer while they were driving in the westbound lanes of Interstate 64-55-70 in the wider, three-lane approach to the bridge. Police were withholding the identity of the victim until his family had been notified of his death.

A third vehicle bumped the rear of the Altima, but suffered no major damage and no injuries, Thompson said. The tractor-trailer had to be towed, but the driver was not hurt, he said.

State police had diverted traffic in the two lanes on the main bridge approach to the other two-lane westbound approach after the crash was reported at 5:19 p.m. until just before 8 p.m.

Thompson said the victim was

Please see MARINE A2



'It's a huge deal for the city of O'Fallon. If (Finance Director Dean Rich) and his staff weren't on the ball, we would have lost the chance to claim this money forever.'

O'Fallon Mayor GARY GRAHAM

Ameren owes O'Fallon \$7.5 million, leaders say

City has filed lien for unpaid utility taxes

By SCOTT WUERZ
News-Democrat

O'FALLON — City leaders have filed a \$7.5 million lien against Ameren because they claim the utility company hasn't been forwarding utility taxes to O'Fallon from about 2,500 city residences for the past several years.

City Finance Director Dean Rich said some residents weren't being taxed at all, while others were being taxed as if they lived in Belleville or even Columbia and the money Ameren collected was being sent to the wrong city.

"The problem is they won't share their list of who they are collecting taxes from with us, so it seems as if a good number of people have fallen through the

cracks," Rich said.

Ameren spokesman Neal Johnson said he hadn't seen O'Fallon's filing as of Thursday. But he said it's not the utility company's responsibility to determine who is to be taxed. It's up to the city to make a list of people affected by the 5 percent utility tax and provide it to the power company.

"They have to supply the utility company with who gets taxed in the area, it's not up to the utility company to try to figure it out," Johnson said. "That responsibility definitely falls upon them. And, as far as a list goes, they should have that and share it with us."

Rich said he doesn't know how

Please see AMEREN, A2