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DeKALB

City employees agree to new contract terms

Contract must be sent to city council for approval

By ELENA GRIMM
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In a 44-3 vote, city employees who have been working without a contract since Jan. 1 approved a tentative agreement with the City of DeKalb Wednesday night.

A round of negotiations began Aug. 22 with a Rockford-based fed-

eral mediator meeting with city staff and union representatives of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. From that and subsequent discussions, the members of Local 813 ratified the proposal Wednesday night after about 90 minutes of discussion and answering members' questions in a basement classroom of City Hall, the AFSCME Council 31 staff representative assigned to the negotiations said.

"People asked good questions," at Wednesday's ratification meeting, AFSCME staff representative Tyler Brown said. A majority of the 75 affected city workers attended and cast their vote on the proposal.

The contract had also been recommended for approval by a five-member union negotiation committee and AFSCME Council 31, Brown said.

The package provides for a new three-year agreement with 4 per-

cent pay raises each year, which will be retroactive back to Jan. 1, which is what they would have received had they not been working under an expired contract. The average salary for this group is \$52,000, Brown said.

City management has agreed to reduce the retirement age for members from 60 down to 55 in agreement for the union accepting a new insurance package, Brown said.

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Negotiation highlights

- Three-year agreement from Jan. 1, 2008, through Dec. 31, 2010
- Four percent pay raises each year for three years
- Members will receive retroactive raises back to Jan. 1.
- Retirement age is reduced from age 60 to age 55.
- Health insurance will change from members paying a percent of wages to a percent of premium for their contribution.
- Members will pay 15 percent of premium for health care starting July 1, 2009, and 20 percent of premium starting July 1, 2010.

NIU | PRESIDENT JOHN PETERS



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Northern Illinois University President John Peters helps freshman Matt Kreiser, 18, transport belongings from his parents' car to his residence hall room in Grant Tower A during NIU's Move-In Day Aug. 21. Peters was on hand during the day to help new students feel comfortable and welcome on campus. "For us, this is always a day of excitement and anticipation," Peters said. "It's a logistical miracle." Kreiser said he was surprised to receive a helping hand from the university's president. "It was nice of him to come out," Kreiser said.

'I love this sense of renewal'

By KATE SCHOTT
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BACK TO CAMPUS

Classes resumed Monday at NIU for the first full semester since the Feb. 14 shootings claimed the lives of five students and injured at least 16 others. The Daily Chronicle has spoken with students, staff and community members about the tragedy and what it means to be starting anew.

Sunday
NIU Student Zach Seward talks about making it out alive from Room 101 of Cole Hall.

Monday
NIU Campus ministers talk about making sense out of the senseless.

Tuesday
Northern Star adviser Jim Killam talks about being a part of a community while covering a tragedy.

Wednesday
Firefighters from the DeKalb Fire Department discuss being first responders.

Thursday
NIU President John Peters shares his hopes for the new academic year.

You've got to start a new academic year excited, John Peters said. And last Thursday was a day of excitement and anticipation for Peters, the president of Northern Illinois University. Aug. 21 was this year's Move-In Day at NIU, and shortly after 9 a.m., Peters was getting ready to help new students move into their residence halls.

"It's a logistical miracle," Peters said, noting that the school planned to move in about 4,700 students that day, using a fleet of golf carts and relying on the assistance of hundreds of volunteers, which include students and staff and community members.

"My feelings every year at this time — I love this sense of renewal and excitement when students are coming back, when the weather changes, when faculty come back," he said.

"Undeniably, we're still working through ... the



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Northern Illinois University senior Jamaron Harris, 25, takes time to chat with NIU President John Peters during Move-In Day Aug. 21 on campus.

healing process continues," he said. "It feels the same, and yet there is that event still in our memories."

That event is the Feb. 14 shootings, when a former NIU student walked into Room 101 in Cole Hall shortly after 3 p.m. and opened fire, killing five students and injuring at least 16 others, before turning the gun on himself.

That day is something that will never be forgotten at NIU, Peters said. It's

the reason the school is doing "extra special things" this year, like programming that focuses on both returning students, who were on campus during the shootings, as well as new students who weren't.

Then there's the Huskie Pact. It's a program by which students can commit to NIU's core values, such as openness and diversity, and a willingness to celebrate tradition and history, he said.

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Cole Hall funding in limbo

House has yet to take action on capital plan

By KATE SCHOTT
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School officials said that plans to remodel Cole Hall — the building at Northern Illinois University where a shooting took place earlier this year — are in limbo because they are still waiting to see if the state will provide funding.

A former NIU student walked into Room 101 in Cole Hall shortly after 3 p.m. Feb. 14 and opened fire, killing five students and injuring at least 16 others before turning the gun on himself. The building has been closed since the shooting, displacing at least 10,000 students and more than 100 classes.

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ENERGY

Wind farm proposal expected

Panelist at forum says interest across Illinois is growing

By DANA HERRA
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OREGON, Ill. — Interest in Illinois as a source of wind-generated electricity has grown in recent years and is likely to grow further, even in parts of the state initially thought to be unsuitable for wind farms, a panelist said Wednesday at a forum held to discuss the issue.

"We're receiving inquiries from Mason County, Monroe County and other counties we did not think would be indicated based on the wind map," said Jerry Quick, attorney for the Illinois Agricultural Association. During the past five years, Quick said, his office has reviewed at least 20 different types of contracts for wind farms across the state.

The sparsely attended forum was hosted by the Ogle, Lee and DeKalb county farm bureaus. A now-operational wind farm in Lee County was the first in the state, and Ogle County approved a project in 2005 that has since been tied up in litigation.

The DeKalb County Board approved a proposal in 2002 that would have built a 64-turbine wind farm straddling the DeKalb-Lee county line, but Florida Power & Light withdrew its proposal in 2003. It resurfaced one to two years ago, when FPL began talking to landowners about leasing land to build the 200-foot-plus-tall turbines.

FPL is expected to come before the county board with a new proposal before the end of the year, DeKalb County Administrator Ray Bockman and County Board Chairwoman Ruth Anne Tobias said in separate phone interviews Wednesday.

Landowners presented with lease agreements by energy companies should be very cautious and, at least initially, ignore the amount of money in the lease, Quick said.

"Leave the compensation for the very end, because based on all the landowners I've spoken to, other things are more important, and you need to be comfortable with those first," Quick said.

He suggested that landowners carefully read the lease themselves, then review it with an attorney. Among key questions to ask are what land is included, how long the lease or easement will last, and what rights the developer has. Landowners should also be satisfied with what will happen to the turbine at the end of its life span, which the industry estimates to be about 25 years.

Lee County Chief Assessment Officer Wendy Ryerson said state legislation passed last year creates a uniform property tax assessment for wind turbines.

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"After that, let the debate continue."

In Our View on Page A6

Weather



High: **83** Low: **62**

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