

A4 CENTRAL ILLINOIS/NATION

Decatur, Illinois • Saturday, November 20, 1999

## Report: Klan took tae at gunpoint

BUTLER, Ind. (AP) — A television news crew was intimidated into surrendering tapes from its interview with a Ku Klux Klan leader in his home, it told police in a complaint.

Reporter George Sells and photojournalist Heidi Thiel of WHAS-TV in Louisville, Ky., were conducting the interview with Jeff Berry on Wednesday when the Klan leader became angry and demanded the tapes. Another man pointed a shotgun at the two and blocked their exit, the news crew said.

Berry, Indiana's imperial wizard of the American Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, was in Decatur Sunday to rally against the Rev. Jesse Jackson's efforts to get six expelled students back into their regular high schools. Berry dismissed the allegations Friday as "a publicity stunt" by WHAS.

DeKalb County sheriff's deputies still were investigating the case Friday. Once their report is finished, it will be submitted to county Prosecutor Monte Brown, who will determine whether any charges will be filed, Chief Deputy John Dennis said.

The report could be completed by this week, Dennis said.

The news crew and the station gave this account of what happened.

Sells and Thiel had gone to Berry's rural home about 25 miles northeast of Fort Wayne to interview him for a story about the Klan and its image. At one point, Berry interrupted the interview and asked the news crew to turn over their tapes and leave.

When Sells refused to give Berry the videotape, Berry took the reporter's microphone and light stand and gave the equipment to a woman who looked

it in a closet.

With the news crew still in the house, Berry then locked one door while the second man blocked another exit to prevent them from leaving.

"I said we cannot give him the tapes," said Sells, who immediately called his boss, news director Maria Reitan.

Reitan said she spoke with Berry, who told her that he was upset because a former Klan member was going to appear in the same broadcast.

She told him it was against station policy to hand over the raw videotape, and she asked him to let the news crew leave the house. In return, she promised the interview would not be aired Thursday night as scheduled.

"He said he did not want his interview to air," said Reitan, who described Berry as sounding "very angry."

Berry started to let the WHAS crew depart after they agreed not to broadcast the interview. However, as they were leaving, another man holding a shotgun entered the house, Sells and Thiel said.

Berry again demanded the tapes, and when Sells refused, "the man pumped the shotgun," according to sheriff's reports.

Sells said the men took two tapes from the crew before they were allowed to leave.

Sheriff's Detective Gary Norton said Berry and three other men who were with Berry in the house at the time denied that the journalists were held at gunpoint or that they took the tapes.

"We've got two people saying it happened and four people saying it didn't," Norton said. "We usually lose those."

## ALTERNATIVE: Students need recommendation

**Continued from A1**

office contacts the school districts in Macon and Putt counties for recommendations. The contacts are usually made on a rotating basis, so the school districts have an equal opportunity for the spots.

The Decatur School District has recommended the six expelled students for placement in alternative schools. The students are expelled from their regular high schools for the rest of the school year for fighting at a Sept. 17 football game at Eisenhower High School.

Decatur school officials could not be reached for comment Friday about Jerad Thorpe's status.

"But, enrollment in the alternative programs are not based on first-come, first-serve," Milligan said. "It's based on priority and need. When we contact a school district, we tell them we have an opening for Futures Unlimited, or whatever, and ask if they recommend anyone. Sometimes they have a list of possible referrals, sometimes only one."

The six expelled students were recommended for alternative education when Gov. George H. Ryan and state Superintendent Glenn W. McGee attempted to broker a compromise last week between Jackson and the school district.

Because there were no openings at the beginning of the school year, Doty said she enrolled her son, who is a second-year freshman, at Eisenhower. Since August, he got into two fistfights on school property.

Doty said her son received a four-day suspension after the first altercation, and the school district was threatening to expel him after the second offense. She withdrew him from school a little more than two weeks ago.

"The dean of students suggested I withdraw him, so I did so he could still be considered for Futures," she said. "He's a good kid. He was passing his classes this year."

Doty said her son was not suspended or expelled last year, nor does he have a juvenile criminal record.

Milligan explained that the alternative programs are not only for disruptive students. Some students, he said, have been thriving in the traditional environment and do better in the different format.

## PETITION: School board rebuts students' charges

**Continued from A1**

to refrain from any form of involvement in any such activity," Wagner said, flanked by Jan Mandernach vice president of the Decatur school board, Michael Diggs president of Decatur Not In Our Town and Mayor Terry Howley.

Behind them stood some 30 supporters of Not In Our Town.

"I want to make it clear that the school board has not requested support from any group," Mandernach said. "The school board does not ask for and does not want the support of individuals involved in hate group activity."

Benjamin Smith, a former member of Hale's World Church of Creation, citywide suicide this summer after a two-state shooting rampage that left two dead and nine wounded, including a Decatur minister.

In federal court, lawyers from the Springfield firm of Kelly Law Offices, P.C. fired back Thursday on behalf of the Decatur school board.

In the response, the school board rebutted the students' charges point by point and urged the court to uphold its discipline policies and the expulsions.

"As parents and school administrators across the country are faced to cope with the reality of deadly violence in our schools, (the) plaintiffs, who were expelled from school for participating in a brutal melee at a high school football game, now ask this Court to disregard all other students' rights to be safe and free of fear in their schools and to supplant the Board's judgment by immediately returning them to school," read the response, signed by attorney Thomas W. Kelly.

The school board's 45-page response included exhibits such as the board's resolution to expel the students and argued that students don't have a sound legal argument.

The school board, Kelly wrote, acted within the scope of state law, properly notified each student and his parents/guardians and carefully reviewed the evidence before deciding on expulsion.

Citing various precedents, Kelly also wrote that the students' petition is invalid because they cannot show that they were irreparably harmed by the expulsions, that they have no legal remedy, or that the public interest would be served.

Kelly also argued that while some school policies must be written and subject to public approval, the "zero tolerance" position does not fall into that category.

"The Board's position statement concerning 'zero tolerance' is a standard or guideline that need not be found for inspection, not a 'rule' for the management of the public schools by which it would be bound," Kelly wrote. "A board is free to adopt standards or guidelines that are couched in general terms requiring some level of subjective judgment, and those standards or guidelines are not 'rules' (as defined by the law)."

The matter will be decided following a hearing that begins Monday morning before federal Judge Michael McCuskey in Urbana.

Lewis Myers Jr., attorney for the six students (a seventh was expelled but not named as a party in this action), said he does not expect the hearing to be concluded in one day.

Hale and some of his followers appeared in Decatur on Thursday at Eisenhower High School and at the Macon-Platt Regional Office of Education, where Jackson took the students to enroll them in alternative schools. Hale had hoped to confront Jackson, but Jackson ignored him.

At Decatur's Not In Our Town news conference Friday, Diggs thanked Antioch Missionary Baptist and First United Methodist churches for sponsoring a community prayer vigil on Thursday to begin the healing process.

"Decatur has shown that it can work through these issues and come together as one community, which we are," Diggs said.

Howley joked that Friday was the first day in weeks that he'd seen so few television cameras covering an event, then he thanked Decatur citizens for their composure during recent days and the Decatur Police Department for its professional handling of tense and stressful situations.

"The events have shown that yes, we do have

### Friday's developments

■ Representatives of Decatur Not In Our Town urged community in a press conference to ignore an appearance by Matt Hale, head of the World Church of Creation, set for 2 p.m. Sunday at Pavilion No. 1 in Nelson Park.

### What's next

■ Decatur City Councilwoman Betsy Stockard plans to lead another "Stop the Violence" march at 1:30 p.m. today, starting at 16th and Cantrell Streets.

■ A prayer vigil for the community is planned for 10-10:30 a.m. Sunday outside Tabernacle Baptist Church, 200 N. Main St.

■ The six expelled students will begin classes Monday in alternative high schools in Decatur.

problems in this community. We're not trying to sweep that under the rug." Howley said. "Ben Jackson's visit to our community has raised some issues that need to be addressed, and they will be addressed. And our community will be a better and stronger place for it."

One of the supporters present was the Rev. Jim Montgomery, pastor of First Presbyterian Church, who took part in the Thursday prayer vigil. Presbyterians, he said, are not usually emotional, but the sight of African-American and white Christians praying together for unity moved him to tears during the vigil.

"Maybe (the religious community) can be the ones who can bring people together, to sit down and talk," he said. "In the last several weeks, I find myself called to bringing blacks and whites in particular together and not apart."

The vandalism of some of the Racism: Not In Our Town signs at Decatur's city limits is a wake-up call to the community, said Decatur Not In Our Town board member Jonathan Lackland.

"Now's the time to come together, now's the time to come up with a strategy to combat certain issues," he said. "We don't have a choice. We've been challenged and we've got to confront it, and we've got to do it together."

To that end, the congregation of Tabernacle Baptist Church will meet on the church grounds at 10:30 a.m. Sunday for a brief prayer vigil.

"What's happened in the last three weeks has sent race relations back several years," said the Rev. Pat Pajak, senior pastor of Tabernacle.

"There have been racial slurs from both the black and white communities. This issue has divided us, and we just want to pray it does not have a long-term effect."

Race relations had progressed with the formation of the Christian Ministers Alliance, Pajak said, which is made up of members of two former organizations, one for African-American ministers and one for white ones. Now that the two groups have united, Pajak said he doesn't want to see that progress undermined.

The church members will stand outdoors, Pajak said, so the community and passers-by can see that they're praying for the city, the city officials, the school board members and members of the community. They plan to pray for healing and for unity among the citizens of Decatur, Pajak said.

He expects a turnout of about 800, because the starting time falls between their usual Sunday school and worship, when the majority of morning attendees will be present.

"As a Christian community, we want to pray God would restore a sense of peace," he said.

A similar hope is in the hearts of those who have planned a communitywide Thanksgiving service at 7 p.m. Tuesday in Hillside Bethel Tabernacle. That service is sponsored by the Christian Ministers Alliance.

"That's what we're going to concentrate on," said the Rev. Wayne Kent, pastor of First Christian Church, one of the churches involved in the Thanksgiving service.

### BRIEFS

#### Holy Family pupils to attend festival

CHARLESTON — Pupils from Holy Family School will attend the Illinois Music Educators Association District Music Festival at Eastern Illinois University today. They will take part in a concert at 4:30 p.m. today in the Grand Ballroom in the Union Building. The concert is open to the public.

The students from the school's Mixed Choir are Ashley Aman, Sarah Curry, Kim Ater, Brian Heisserer and Josh Milligan.

From the eighth grade, and Jessica Milligan, seventh grade. Students are chosen to attend the festival by teacher recommendation and approved by a panel of IMEA coordinators and

#### teachers.

Holy Family Glee Club members Ella Wayne, Danayelle Hooks, Allison Grubbs, Michelle Manfili, Elizabeth Hood, Blake Rodgers and Mitch Albright attended the IMEA Elementary Choral District Festival at Eastern on Nov. 8.

#### Dunning named RCC board chairman

DECATUR — Wayne Dunning was elected chairman of the Richland Community College Board of Trustees on Tuesday. Dunning, a Decatur resident, has served on the board since 1993. Thomas R. England was named vice president and Carol L. Chilli was elected secretary.

On Tuesday, the Richland board also thanked Sharon Alpi for her

services. Alpi served for six years. Larry Osborne of Forsyth, who was elected in April, took Alpi's seat. The Decatur district sent his oath of office Tuesday.

#### Babies to compete in Effingham contest

EFFINGHAM — The Sunburst USA preliminary pageant and baby contest will be at the K-Square Mall in Effingham at 1 p.m. today.

The registration is at 11:30 a.m. Babies age 1 to 3 and girls age 4 to 27 are eligible to compete. Effingham winners are eligible to compete in the state finals in Springfield in May.

Entry forms are available at the mall office, or from Tammy Renee Harris, (618) 662-4461.

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## It's Santa's Big Show.

Santa Claus arrives at Hickory Point Mall for the Holidays on Saturday, November 20th at 1:00 PM. Join the marching band at the northeast Mall entrance near Pennies as they escort everyone's favorite elf to his seasonal home at the Bergher's court.

Don't forget to ride the

Hickory Point Express train while you are at the Mall. Train hours are 10 AM to 8 PM Monday through Saturday, Noon to 5 PM on Sundays.

Closed Thanksgiving Day. Open Nov. 26th and 27th, 8 AM to 9 PM

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