

A4 CENTRAL ILLINOIS/STATE Decatur, Illinois • Friday, December 3, 1999

JOBS: Company says helping laid-off employees a top priority

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numbers of people laid off but not from occupations such as these."

Throughout the process of merging, Illinois Power's parent company, Houston-based Enron Corp., the top considerations has been how to deal with employees, said Shirley Sorenson, a spokeswoman for the utility.

Illinois Power is providing severance packages to employees, early retirees, and others and has hired an outside firm to assist employees with their job searches. Some employees may relocate to Houston.

The company also is planning a job fair for former to assist employees in finding new jobs with local employers.

Among the largest local work force reductions since 1980 was the claim that occurred at the Caterpillar Inc. assembly plant.

SURREAL: Protesters claim victory

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A protestor who had been in, then another hour inside before I gave up and left. The ceremony was eventually canceled around noon because many top dignitaries never showed up.

And so, the protesters claimed victory over international headlines to protest American and global standards on the WTO for the first time in its existence.

The rest of Tuesday was a bust. Not only had I planned to write about what was happening, no one knew it would.

Outside the Washington Convention and Trade Center, war raged in the streets. Rubber bullets flew, clouds of tear gas filled the streets. A crowd now estimated at 10,000 now estimat-

ed all the time was with the WTO.

Most of them were peaceful demonstrators in favor of labor unions and in opposition of the crowd and began smashing windows, spraying graffiti and, in some cases, looting.

I was the only time talking to protesters but stayed indoors when the bullet started flying.

On Wednesday, I spent an hour chit-chatting about where President Clinton would speak. When I finally arrived at the hotel, I was stopped by a snarling Secret Service agent who informed me that I was not getting in.

What are the protesters so angry about?

They are angry that the WTO does not do enough to protect U.S. law protecting wildlife. They are angry that WTO policies tend to export high-paying manufacturing jobs to other countries. They are angry that U.S. corporations seem to have more influence over WTO decisions than average citizens.

And, by and large, they are right.

Anyons who spends a week on the inside at the WTO sees the association attitude dimmed by big business and trade delegates. Yet, the ministers control other delegations, including environmentalists and consumer groups that have far less cash to throw around.

For instance, the American Farm Bureau Federation held a reception Wednesday that was also attended by American business corporations. It was also attended by trade ministers. It was also attended by trade ministers.

The staff at the WTO included salmon, capers, ham, cheeses, pickled vegetables, a dizzying variety of pâté, roasted pork, chicken and

"400 our high point there were about 4,500 union members," said Karen Verhosen, president of United Auto Workers Union Local 751, which represents about 1,000 workers. "Now we have a big layoff. At one point there were about 950 laid off," including herself.

Most of the laid-off workers never returned, although some did return, Verhosen said.

In the past, when industrial workers were laid off, they either got another job or returned to return to the same job, Sorenson said.

"When a person has worked for a company for many years, and fully expected to receive from that firm, but not from the company, that can be as devastating to a highly skilled and credentialed person as is the loss of a factory job to an hourly worker," Sorenson said. "Those peo-

son said, "I felt most of the people affected are very employable. Once we receive notice from the state that Illinois Power has filed a formal layoff notice with us, we'll get involved immediately. We'll contact the company and offer our rapid response assistance."

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son probably have a house, two cars, maybe a boat and face a change in their lifestyle that is emotionally trying."

James Fim of The Fim Group, a job services and counseling firm in Decatur, said he still encounters people who believe they will always have a job, a job for a longtime.

He said laid-off people realize that job loss can happen to anyone.

"It's often a significant grief," Fim said. "There is denial and anger that occurs when they have grief. People need to try to be aware of things so you can be prepared if the need arises for you."

Not only do you feel loss and anger but, depending on the number of years of employment, you can feel betrayed.

Younger people he interviews laugh when he tells them they can have a good career with a single parent, Fim said.

Eight protest lack of action on gay rights bill

Continued from A1

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For example, the European Union agreed to discuss forming a working group on biotechnology in the news conference Thursday that developing nations still feel left out.

The organization has established five working groups to tackle issues. The agriculture group is the largest, with Industry Minister George Weis of Singapore.

A key issue in the negotiations is the reduction of export subsidies.

The United States and many other countries are asking for the elimination of export subsidies, while the EU is adamantly opposed to any modifications.

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PROCESS: Biotech issue uncertain

Continued from A1

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beef and parfait glasses made from solid chocolate filled with mint cream.

The United States dominated the gatherings, partly because the conference was on U.S. soil, and dominates the WTO, with the exception of the European Union.

On Wednesday, I had heard

rumors behind the scenes that a group of Australian delegates had been invited to a speech by Ambassador Peter Scher, special counselor to the U.S. trade negotiator on agriculture.

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