

BUSINESS
BRIEFICC: Give ComEd fraction
of requested rate hike

The Illinois Commerce Commission's staff has proposed giving Commonwealth Edison Co. \$78 million of the utility's requested \$396 million rate increase. Though a preliminary step, the proposal stems partly from an Illinois Appellate Court ruling that killed the method that ComEd was using to recover costs of its "smart" meter test.

ComEd had been charging all 3.8 million of its northern Illinois customers the expense of paying for the pilot smart-meter program, even though the meters are set up in only 131,000 households in Chicago's West Side and near-west suburbs. A final decision on ComEd's \$396 million rate-hike request, which would mean an average 7 percent increase in a homeowner's electric bill, is up to the five-member ICC board. ComEd is asking the appellate court to rehear the smart-meter case.

Holiday deals start early

Retailers intent on gaining a share of shoppers' holiday spending are advertising deals this weekend. Walmart and Toys R Us are discounting deals on toys, including Toys R Us' introduction of a Justin Bieber doll Sunday. Sears and Amazon.com are touting "Black Friday" deals, comparing the discounts to those they offer the day after Thanksgiving, and Sears and Kmart are offering expanded layaway programs. New websites offer to help Chicago shoppers find the best deals. Just launched are DashMob, a deal site that uses geo-targeting via GPS to send discounts to shoppers' e-mail or mobile devices. LivingSocial offers daily deals in suburban West Chicago, and Chatertree provides a social network for invited members to create gift wish lists.

Homeowners see rate hike

State Farm Insurance Cos. has increased Illinois homeowners' insurance rates by 5.3 percent, according to a filing with the state Department of Insurance. The increase started for new customers Nov. 1, and will take effect for renewing customers Jan. 1.

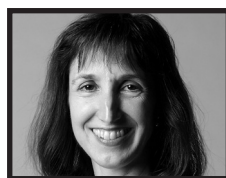
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SUN-TIMES MONEY

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SCIENCE

SCI-TECH SCENE | Essay envisions how society's most vexing problems will be solved



SANDRA GUY

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Benjamin Boswell discovered his interest in science and technology when he started growing a sugar cane plant in his front yard in the Near South Side neighborhood.

Boswell, a 14-year-old eighth-grader at Mark Sheridan Academy at 533 W. 27th St., got the idea from his grandparents, natives of the West Indies who grow sugar cane, mangos, papayas, bananas and other plants at their home in Florida. "My grandpa always gives me sugar cane to try, and I love it," he said.

Boswell started his experiment at the start of the summer, and now has an 18-inch-high plant gracing the lawn. He has tried various remedies, including cinnamon oil, to keep it healthy.

Boswell got a big boost in his aspirations to be a chemist — and to get his Ph.D. at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology — when he won the essay-writing contest sponsored by the Chicago Council on Science and Technology.

His essay set up a futuristic interview featuring himself — already holding his doctorate title — telling a CNN news reporter how cancer and other diseases had been cured by nanotechnology, global warming solved by magnetic cars replacing fuel-injected autos, and nuclear plants abandoned for plants that take water from the moon via transport beams. Boswell envisions floating homes being built on the water, interconnected by walkways.

Boswell said he didn't believe that he had won the essay award until a friend told him that the awardees had been given rankings.

The other three winners are Miriam Gallarzo at Henry Clay Elementary School, Francisco Guerra-



Benjamin Boswell, 14, a student at Mark Sheridan Academy, won the essay writing contest for the Chicago Council on Science and Technology. | RICH HEIN~SUN-TIMES

Escoto at James Hedges Elementary and Nyaria Mayberry at Medgar Evers Elementary.

Alan Schriesheim, president of the Chicago Council on Science and Technology and director emeritus at Argonne National Laboratory, said the council sponsored the essay contest as part of its efforts to reach a broader audience.

"Our goal is to raise the awareness of the importance of science and technology to the citizenry of Chicago," he said. "We got our start about four years ago when a group of senior technical-policy people asked ourselves, 'Why don't we create an organization similar to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, but focusing on science and technology?'"

The council (c2st.org), housed on the campus of the Illinois Institute of Technology, sponsors programs with authors and experts on topics ranging from bioethics to dark matter to stem-cell research. The council's next program, on Nov. 16 and

co-sponsored with Children's Memorial Research Center, features author Rebecca Skloot, whose book, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, traces the history of the scientific community's unauthorized use of a poor African-American tobacco farmer's cells in developing the polio vaccine and uncovering secrets of viruses and cancer.

The council's goal is to double its operating budget, to \$500,000 annually, host two programs a month, gain greater public recognition and work more closely with the Chicago public school system.

"We are the only organization that pulls together on our board leading institutions such as Chicago's major universities and museums, Argonne, Fermilab, the Chicago Biomedical Consortium and the Chicago Community Trust, among others," Schriesheim said.

The council's efforts to reach a broader audience come on the heels of reports showing that Americans'

ability to compete for good jobs in a global economy continues to deteriorate and that students are falling behind in attaining college-level understanding of science and math.

China has replaced the United States as the world's leading high-technology exporter, and one-third of U.S. manufacturing companies told surveyors they suffer from some level of skills shortage among workers and would-be hires, according to a report issued Sept. 23 by the National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council.

The President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology recommended in September that the federal government help recruit and train 100,000 teachers in grades K-12 in science, technology, engineering and mathematics education (STEM), create 1,000 new STEM-focused schools and reward the top 5 percent of STEM teachers.