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BUSINESS

THE KANSAS CITY STAR
Saturday, September 13, 2003

Missouri Public
Service Commission

State finds MGE overreached' in disconnection

Raytown man lost power after refusal to pay wife's bill

By STEVE EVERLY
The Kansas City Star

Facing criticism from state regulators, Missouri Gas Energy has resumed service to a Raytown man whose gas was shut off because his new wife had an unpaid bill.

The staff of the Missouri Public Service Commission concluded in a report filed this week that the utility had "overreached" when it disconnected gas service to Michael McKinzy in June after he refused to pay his new wife's gas bill, which was nearly 5 years old.

The commission recommended this week that the regulatory agency's commissioners order the

utility to resume service to McKinzy, Missouri Gas Energy had 30 days to appeal the staff report's findings but said Friday that it would not appeal.

The issue hinged on whether the couple actually lived together, which would have allowed the utility to disconnect service if the wife's bill was not paid. Paul Snider, a spokesman for the utility, said the utility assumed that the married couple lived together but "evidently that was not the case." Gas service was returned to the McKinzy residence on Thursday.

McKinzy said that since June he had heated water on an electric stove for bathing and washing dishes. In addition, he said, his four children from a previous marriage have had to move out of the residence, disrupting their schooling. "My family has been subjected to

ing responsible for the gas bill and

service was transferred to McKinzy. McKinzy's gas bill at his previous residence had been paid, which typically would have meant no problems in transferring service to him at his new home. But his difficulties began when Missouri Gas Energy learned he had remarried. They asked for his wife's Social Security number and uncovered a \$450 bill that had been incurred from December 1998 to March 1999.

He said he was told to pay half of his wife's bill, and gas service at his residence would continue. If not, the service would be disconnected. McKinzy declined, saying he had never lived at the residence where the bill had been incurred. The gas at his residence in Raytown was terminated June 18, according to the commission staff's report.

Shortly after his home was left without natural gas, McKinzy filed a

complaint with the Missouri Public Service Commission, which triggered an investigation over the summer.

The commission's report concluded that McKinzy could not be forced to pay his wife's bill. The conclusion was based in part on the fact that McKinzy had not received any benefit from the unpaid gas service. He didn't know his current wife when the debt was incurred. That standard by itself, however, is not necessarily sufficient to be absolved of responsibility for a utility bill. Missouri Gas Energy's tariff — which are the rules the utility has agreed to follow — states that it can refuse service if anyone in an applicant's household owes the utility money for the use of gas an applicant benefits from.

The commission's staff said that the provision means if persons in a customer's "household" were in

debts to the utility, then service could be refused. McKinzy's wife was not on the lease for the Raytown residence. She was also not a resident in the home — information confirmed by the property owner who was leasing the residence, according to the staff report.

Because McKinzy did not benefit from the gas that caused his wife's debt and since his wife did not live in his household, the utility could not make McKinzy responsible for the debt, the staff concluded. The commission said the utility was still free to collect the debt from McKinzy's wife using other means than refusing gas service to McKinzy.

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Cabot to begin building new clinic

By JULIUS A. KARASH
The Kansas City Star

Cabot Westside Health Center, an institution with deep roots in the area's Hispanic community, will break ground on a new clinic Monday. The \$9,000-square-foot clinic will be built at the corner of Summit Street and West Pennway. It will cost \$5.5 million, including construction costs of \$4 million. Cabot, part of the St. Luke's Health System, operates out of a 7,000-square-foot facility at 1800



Retail sales fail to meet expectations

Energy prices, unemployment take their toll

By JEANNINE AVERSA
The Associated Press

Retail sales

Here is a look at retail sales, seasonally adjusted.

\$319.2 billion

320 billion

WASHINGTON — After spending