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Cox looks beyond Fieger to re-election in '06

BY DAN WEST
STAFF WRITER

Attorney General Mike Cox is trying to rebound politically after a tumultuous two months stemming from his office's criminal investigation into Geoffrey Fieger.

Cox, a Livonia Republican who plans to run for re-election in 2006, is in the midst of a media firestorm from the situation that moved him to admit he had an extramarital affair. While he'd

rather talk about his efforts to collect \$20 million for children from their dead-beat parents and his price battles with Michigan's utility companies, Cox said he has no regrets about his handling of the Fieger situation because his actions protected his office's integrity.

"The bottom line is, if I didn't come forward and our office ended up not charging Geoffrey Fieger, it would have been out six, seven months ago what he... tried to do," Cox said. "Then, peo-

ple would say the office buckled under and did something underhanded, or some how, I put the integrity of the office over my own personal pride or embarrassment.

"It's very important that this office maintain its integrity."

According to Cox, Fieger planned to disclose the infidelity in an attempt to thwart the attorney general's investigation into charges Fieger illegally funneled \$457,000 into an unsuccessful bid to defeat a Michigan

Supreme Court candidate in 2004. Fieger was not charged in connection with the blackmail allegation.

The campaign finance investigation continues. In a bid to distance himself from the Fieger probe, Cox appointed an independent investigator, Patrick Shannon, a former prosecutor from Sault Ste. Marie to take over the case.

Fieger, a flamboyant, national-



Attorney General Mike Cox and his wife, Wayne County Commissioner Laura Cox, share a moment at a coffee shop near their home in Livonia.

PLEASE SEE COX, A5



BILL BRESLER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Terry and Janet Blumberg talk about the loss of their son, Trevor, who is the only Canton soldier killed in action since the end of the Vietnam War.

Some charities report holiday shortfalls

BY MATT JACHMAN
STAFF WRITER

A slow state economy and the demands of recent disaster relief efforts have apparently taken a moderate toll on Christmastime philanthropy in the suburbs.

Reports from groups such as the Salvation Army and the Goodfellows show some campaigns are meeting fund-raising goals while others are taking in less than organizers had hoped.

"Judging from what we did last year at this time, it looks like we're going to be down quite a bit," said Dick Tupper, president of the Farmington Area Goodfellows.

Tupper's group, which provides needy families with food baskets, toys (through Toys for Tots) and necessities like clothing, raised about \$67,000 last year, but is on course to be about 30 percent below that this year, Tupper said.

"We get the feedback that because of what's been going on in the world the last eight or 10 months, we really should expect our collections to be down," Tupper added. But he was still surprised at the shortfall, he said.

Yet Marie Morrow, president of the Plymouth Community United Way, said the group should meet its fund-raising target of \$1.3 million this year.

Morrow said she sees growing needs in the community, but also more generosity. The United Way campaign began in late August and lasts through the end of the year. "Obviously there've been challenges out there with the economy and natural disasters," she said. "People have really kind of dug deeper in those times."

At the Plymouth Salvation Army, Red Kettle campaign coordinator Kelly Boelter recently said donations were trending short of a \$155,000 goal.

Lower returns were also seen at the Canton Goodfellows, where president Nancy Spencer said newspaper sales brought in \$4,300, which is between \$500 and \$700 short of what's typical.

A mail solicitation, she said Thursday, has brought in

PLEASE SEE CHARITIES, A2



Trevor Blumberg of Canton was killed by a roadside bomb in Iraq in 2003.

Stay the course

Parents of slain soldier say America must finish job in Iraq

BY KURT KUBAN
STAFF WRITER

On Sept. 14, 2003, a roadside bomb in Iraq ripped apart the Humvee that U.S. Army Sgt. Trevor Blumberg was traveling in with three other soldiers. As a result of the explosion, the 22-year-old Blumberg, who had only arrived in the country three days

earlier with the rest of his battalion, became the first Canton soldier killed in action since the Vietnam War.

That roadside bomb also ripped from Terry and Janet Blumberg their only son. In the more than two years since that fateful day, the longtime Canton residents have tried to cope with the loss. They are tremendously proud of

the sacrifice their son made for his country, but worry it might be in vain if America doesn't complete its mission in Iraq - to create a flourishing democracy in the heart of the Middle East.

Terry, who is a Vietnam veteran, said the news of his son's death was difficult to accept, but some-

PLEASE SEE BLUMBERG, A4

Livonia senior gives holiday bash

BY STEPHANIE ANGELYN CASOLA
STAFF WRITER

Patty Ash donned a red hat and suit, complete with a snowy Santa beard, Thursday when she brought the spirit of Christmas to Livonia's Civic Park Senior Center.

Ash, a lifelong Livonia resident, is visually impaired. But a lack of

eyesight doesn't stop her from sewing festive Christmas costumes, creating a holiday skit, and building a sleigh complete with reindeer - all to entertain friends and staff at the senior center.

"I'm going to motivate the group," said Ash, 70.

For years she hosted Christmas parties for children - with up to

300 kids in attendance. Now, she's taken that idea to the senior center. After all, "Christmas is fun," she said.

Joan Gebhardt first met Ash this summer when she was calling bingo at the Senior Center. Gebhardt calls her simply "amaz-

PLEASE SEE ASH, A7



TOM HAWLEY | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Patty Ash, a visually impaired Livonia senior, saved her Bingo winnings this year to throw a holiday party at the Civic Park Senior Center. Behind her stand snowman Mary Jamison, reindeer Marie Sliwinski, Beverly Gust and Christmas tree Wanda Smith. Volunteer Nancy Klien (right) helped hand out the gifts Ash purchased for everyone.

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CHARITIES

FROM PAGE A1

about \$5,500 so far.

"It's a few thousand short," Spencer said of the mail drive, adding, "It's still pretty good." Savings supplemented the group's No Child Without a Christmas program this year, she said. Boelter said the red kettle campaign was affected by her group's earlier hurricane relief work. The Plymouth Salvation Army, she said, raised more than \$60,000 in a three-week span and sent it to the southern U.S. for hurricane relief.

HELP WANTED

Groups also report that fundraising volunteers - bell-ringers for the red kettle drive, for example - are sometimes scarce.

"I am having difficulty getting and keeping bell-ringers this year," said Boelter. "It was extremely difficult."

The Plymouth Salvation Army had 23 kettle locations in its area (including Plymouth, Plymouth Township and Canton Township), but Boelter said a large percentage of sites went unmanned - meaning the kettles were unavailable to potential donors.

For example, out of a 30-day campaign, Boelter said recently, the kettle at the post office in Belleville was covered for just four hours. She called that "devastating."

"Nobody wants to stand out in the cold," Spencer said. The Canton Goodfellows, she said, had only eight people hawking its fund-raising papers this year, down from 22 last year.

"The eight people who did sell papers did so remarkably well," she said.

BRIGHT SPOTS

Livonia Goodfellows president Bill Heaton said Thursday that fund raising was nearing 90 percent of the approximately \$100,000 the group has typically raised in each of the last few years. "I think things have gone very well, better than anticipated this year," Heaton said.

Heaton said he expects to reach the \$100,000 mark. Canned good donations were off a bit, he said, but the Goodfellows had an adequate number of toys (mostly from Toys for Tots and its own drive). The Livonia Goodfellows assisted about 235 families this

To give ...

Here are the addresses of some Observer-area charities that conduct holiday-time fund drives:

■ Canton Goodfellows, 1150 S. Canton Center Road, Canton, MI 48188

■ Redford Goodfellows, P.O. Box 40681 Redford, MI 48239

■ Farmington Area Goodfellows, 30903-B West 10 Mile, Farmington Hills, MI 48336

■ Plymouth Community United Way, P.O. Box 3653, Plymouth, MI 48170

■ Wayne Westland Corps, The Salvation Army, 2300 Veno, Westland, MI 48186

■ Plymouth Salvation Army, 9451 S. Main Street, Plymouth, MI 48170

■ Livonia Goodfellows Inc., P.O. Box 51982, Livonia, MI 48151

year, with some 625 children among them. It relied heavily on a mailed plea, getting only about \$10,000 from its paper sale, Heaton said.

At the Salvation Army's Wayne-Westland Corps, Capt. Matt O'Neil was pleased with the Red Kettle drive's results. The goal was \$115,000, and with donations at about \$82,000 or \$83,000 as of Monday, O'Neil is optimistic, though he said it will be "pretty tight."

"Our drive's going better than I imagined," he said. "I thought it would be a lot less."

In Redford, Goodfellows president John Buck said the group will be able to pay its bills. Its paper sale brought in about \$13,000, roughly \$1,000 less than last year, but the group also gets mailed donations.

The need in Redford rose significantly, with more than 200 families getting aid this year, compared to 185 last year.

For Spencer of the Canton Goodfellows, despite coming up short in fund raising, it was gratifying that some 500 needy children in the group's service area were "adopted" by donors who provided them with Christmas gifts. It was the first time in the group's history that all eligible children had been adopted, she said. "As far as I'm concerned that's a miracle," she said.

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Snow problem leads to disorderly charge

A 29-year-old woman was arrested on a disorderly conduct charge during a dispute over snow removal on Woodworth Street north of Seven Mile in Redford on Dec. 15.

Neighbors were accusing each other of throwing snow on each other's driveway, a police report said.

Police were called when a man cleared his driveway with a snowblower that sent the snow onto a driveway across the street, police said.

The suspect, 49, admitted doing so, but said the neighbor had thrown salt on his lawn, killing the grass, something the complainant denied. The man agreed to remove the snow from the complainant's driveway, though he became argumentative and was warned to calm down, police said.

A woman from his house, however, persisted in yelling about the complainant, saying he always throws snow on their driveway, police said.

Several people were watching the incident, and the woman was arrested after yelling at police and being warned at least three times to calm down, police said.

Track leads to arrest

A 45-year-old man was arrested on two warrants related to drug offenses as police investigated a break-in at a house on Deborah Street in Redford Thursday evening.

The house's side door had been forced open, and a pry bar was found on a bed inside, a police report said.

Books of checks were reported stolen.

An officer noticed footprints in the snow in the back yard, and a tracking dog, Czar, took police to a side door of a neighboring house.

That's where police found the man with the outstanding warrants. He refused to let police search his bedroom, and a search warrant was sought.

Grinchy thief

Wrapped Christmas presents, plus digital video discs and videotapes, were reported stolen from a house on Wormer Street north of Five Mile in Redford after a burglary on Tuesday. The complainant told police

CRIME WATCH

he came home to find a doorwall open. He couldn't remember if it had been secured, police said.

The man's bedroom had been ransacked.

Restaurant theft

An official for the Buffalo Wild Wings restaurant in Westland reported that someone broke into the business between 2 a.m. and 9 a.m. Tuesday.

The restaurant is located on Wayne Road north of Ford.

The break-in was discovered when an assistant manager and a representative for Red Bull - a company that sells energy drinks - came to the restaurant to open it Tuesday morning.

They found that a window of an exit door had been broken and that someone had gone into a restaurant safe to take an undisclosed amount of money, according to a police report.

The investigation was continuing.

The uninvited

A man who lives on Orange Street in the Westland Meadows mobile home park in Westland reported a home invasion that he said occurred between 4 p.m. Monday and 10:30 p.m. Tuesday.

The mobile home park is located near Merriman and Van Born roads on the city's southeast side.

The resident said he hadn't been home in two days and that the incident occurred as he was trying to move out of the mobile home park, according to a police report.

He reported some damage inside his house but said it didn't appear that anything had been stolen. He told police that it appeared his home was simply used for a party.

One witness told police that she saw three men she didn't recognize enter the house.

Sob story

Canton police weren't buying a Livonia man's sob story when they arrested him for shoplifting at the Canton Meijer store on Dec. 16.

According to a police report,

the man was shopping in the store at 9:15 p.m. He had two young boys with him. A loss prevention officer watched as the man stuffed packages of sports cards into his jacket.

He and the boys picked up a shovel and some de-icing pellets and paid for them, but store personnel stopped him near the exit to ask him about the cards.

When police arrived to question him, officers asked where the boys' mother was so they could call her to come pick up the children before he was taken to the police station.

He told police that the boys' mother had died eight months earlier, and that money was tight. "I just wanted to give the boys a good Christmas," he told the officers, the report said.

But when the twin 4-year-old boys were questioned separately, they told police that their mother had taken them to school the previous day.

Officers took all three to the police station. When questioned again about the whereabouts of the boys' mother, he insisted, "I swear on my kids' lives she's dead."

The man was able to make bail, and a friend was called to take him and the children home.

When the friend arrived, police asked about the mother, and the friend said not only is she alive, but she's not married to the man who had been arrested. He is a live-in boyfriend and is not the father of the children, the friend said.

Police were able to contact the mother, who picked up the children.

Officers also called Child Protective Services. The man was released after being charged with shoplifting and posting a \$300 bond.

Vandalism

Two residents of apartments in the 31000 block of Pardo in Garden City reported two tires punctured on each of their vehicles, resulting in \$250 damage apiece, on Tuesday. Both vehicles were parked on the street.

Also on Tuesday, a resident in the 30000 block of John Hauk reported one tire on a vehicle had been punctured while it was parked in the driveway. The damage was set at \$150.

Fraud

A resident in the 500 block of Helen in Garden City told police Tuesday that she'd received a collection notice for \$200 overdue on a DTE account she hadn't opened.

The account was listed at an address at a Wayne apartment building, where the woman said her brother's former girlfriend had lived.

Counterfeit bill

An employee at the Shell gas station at 120 Middlebelt in Garden City told police Tuesday that he was counting money from the cash register when he found a counterfeit \$20. The bill was turned over to police.

Retail fraud

A Garden City man was arrested Tuesday for shoplifting ham and a frozen apple pie valued at \$11 from Kroger, 5866 Middlebelt, in Garden City. An employee said the man was detained after he was spotted leaving with the items hidden under his clothing.

On Wednesday, an employee at CVS Pharmacy, 29901 Ford Road, reported that beer and two packages of diapers valued at \$50 were stolen by a man and woman. The employee said he followed the couple outside to their vehicle and saw the items on the back seat. He said he talked to the man but the suspect drove off.

Suspended license

Garden City police on Wednesday arrested a Detroit man for driving with three license suspensions and having an outstanding warrant, and cited him for having no proof of insurance.

An officer reported noticing the man sitting in a running vehicle near the entrance to an apartment building in the 30000 block of Krauter while checking the area in response to recent vandalism complaints.

On Thursday, a Detroit woman was arrested for driving with five license suspensions and possession of suspected marijuana. She was also held on two warrants. She had been stopped for driving with high beams on.

by Observer staff

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Living it up

Three neighbors celebrate their 100th birthdays

BY STACY JENKINS
STAFF WRITER

When these ladies were born, the average life expectancy was 47 years. The average wage was 22 cents per hour. Sugar and flour cost 4 cents per pound and a dozen eggs cost 14 cents.

That was 100 years ago. Louise Frid, Kay Langan and Hazel Farrell, all neighbors at the Grand Court senior citizen residence in Farmington Hills, reached the milestone this year. Louise turned 100 on July 23; Hazel celebrated 100 years on Nov. 19; and Kay had her 100th birthday on Dec. 17.

The neighbors gathered in the cozy lobby of Grand Court to receive a special recognition from state Rep. Aldo Vagnozzi, D-Farmington Hills, recently and they told their secrets to longevity.

"Working hard, keeping busy all the time and being glad the Lord lets you live every day," said Hazel, who has lived in Farmington Hills for 35 years.

Born in Canton, Ohio, she was one of seven children. Her family moved to Michigan when she was 8 years old and she grew up on Detroit's west side. She married Gerard E. "Ted" Farrell and they raised seven children.

Today, she fills her days with friends and family. She stays active at Grand Court.

"I go and do everything they have here," she said. "I have a purse I call my bingo purse."

Louise also gets around the Grand Court community. Even at 100, she still walks the hallways every morning. Staying healthy is her secret.

"I can't believe it myself," she said. "Day after day, not a pain. I still enjoy life and I enjoy the people around me."

Louise was born in Arizona and moved to Michigan when she was a child. Her parents traveled to the Midwest by horse and wagon. She grew up on a farm in Caro. She had three children.

Kay, who lived half of her life in Southfield, had a remarkable birthday present delivered to her in mid-December.

Sitting on a table in the lobby of Grand Court was a giant arrangement of 100 roses — 99 were brilliant red and one was a white rose, in memory of her husband, Tom.

Kay was born in Canada and came to Michigan in 1929. Her husband didn't like factory work, so the couple opened a gas station at the corner of 11 Mile and Northwestern Highway. The gas station was demolished when the highway was widened. The couple used the money they received from the buyout to

open Nor-West Lanes, which is still in the family. Kay's grandchildren run the bowling alley, located at 14 Mile and Northwestern.

Kay is thankful for her many blessings at 100 years of age.

"It's wonderful to live," she smiled. "I have a lot to be thankful for. I'm thankful for my health and that the Lord has left

me here."

Healthy living and taking one day at a time is Kay's secret to living an active life, even when you're a century old. She's optimistic and sees the beauty in everyone she meets.

"I've met some beautiful people here," she said.

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'I can't believe it myself. Day after day, not a pain. I still enjoy life and I enjoy the people around me.'

Louise Frid
100 years old



Hazel Farrell, Kay Langan, and Louise Frid are all 100 years old. They are neighbors at the Grand Court senior living community in Farmington Hills.

BILL BRESLER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

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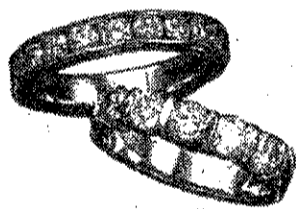
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Garden City Middle School's B.A.R.K. (Bull Dog Athletics Reaching Kids) is sponsoring a night at The Palace of Auburn Hills on Saturday, Jan. 7, when the Pistons take the floor against the Utah Jazz at 7:30 p.m.

Tickets sell for \$35 per person. Each ticket holder will receive a Detroit Pistons backpack and one hour of post-game court time on The Palace floor.

Tickets are by calling Judy Nichols at (734) 513-6760. Payment must be made in the form of cash or check made payable to Garden City Public Schools with a note of Piston Night in the memo section of the check.

Proceeds from the Pistons game benefits the intramural sports program at the middle school.

BLUMBERG

FROM PAGE A1

thing he prepared himself for since the day his son told him he had joined the Army back in 2001.

"The day he put on a uniform, I was prepared that this might happen," he said. "But it was still the hardest day of my life. And it was even harder on my wife."

For the Blumbergs, the news of Trevor's death was the beginning of a whirlwind couple weeks, during which time they not only had to come to grips with his death, but also had to make funeral arrangements and the like. Fortunately, the Blumbergs say the Army went all out to make sure they had everything they needed to get through a very difficult time.

Unfortunately, they were also bombarded by the media. They quickly learned that dying soldiers make good news stories. They say it became somewhat of a frenzy outside their home on Longfellow Street. At one point it became so bad, they say a local TV news reporter literally accosted Trevor's elderly grandmother as she tried to walk up to the house. Finally a couple Canton police officers blocked off the street to outside traffic, until interest in Trevor's death began to wane.

During the episode, the

Blumbergs say they developed a general mistrust of the media, something that continues to this day. In fact, Terry believes the media is much to blame for the American public's growing disillusionment with the war in Iraq.

"We have constant contact with the soldiers who are on the ground. Those guys are doing some great stuff over there, but you would never even know it with the way the war is being reported. The soldiers we talk to say the reporters never even leave the safety of the Green Zone, and have no idea of what's really happening," he said.

Terry is no stranger to the controversy that can surround a war. He served in Vietnam during the tumultuous years of 1967-68, and went through the Tet Offensive, an event many believe was the turning point of the war - when the American public began to question why we were there.

Despite the fact that recent polls suggest the majority of the American public believes it was a mistake going into Iraq, Terry says he doesn't see many similarities with the Vietnam era. Both he and Janet, who are both 60, said they have believed in this war from the beginning. The fact that it took their son makes them even more resolute. They just hope the country feels the same way. "It all depends on our inter-



Amanda Marshall, Trevor Blumberg's only sibling, holds her 3-month-old son, Logan, who is the first grandchild of Terry and Janet Blumberg (in background).

'The soldiers we talk to say the reporters never even leave the safety of the Green Zone, and have no idea of what's really happening.'

Terry Blumberg
father of slain soldier Trevor Blumberg

tinal fortitude and the people in Washington. If they give up, then it's over," said Terry, who is a home inspector.

The Blumbergs have lived in the Embassy Squares subdivision since 1988, when Trevor

was just 5. He became a fixture in the neighborhood, graduating from Plymouth Salem in 1999. His sister and only sibling, Amanda Marshall, said Trevor didn't have a ton of friends, but to those he did have he was extremely loyal. That's why she wasn't surprised when he first told her he was going to join the Army, something she knew before their parents.

"You could just tell that college wasn't for him. He was intelligent enough, but he wanted something more for his life," she said.

The Blumbergs say they have been honored the way the Canton community has supported them, from local veterans groups to township officials, but especially their neighbors, who really helped them get through the toughest times after Trevor's death.

Members of Trevor's platoon, who affectionately called him "Blum," have also helped relieve some of the Blumbergs' pain. Terry says they hear from the soldiers on a weekly basis, and one of Trevor's soldier buddies has even become the godfather to Marshall's 3-month-old son, Logan, who is the Blumbergs' first grandchild.

"I lost a son and gained 130," Terry said.

Janet Blumberg, who is the principal at Henry Ruff Elementary School in Garden City, said Trevor's death has given her more perspective of what other families are going through whose sons or daughters

have died in Iraq or elsewhere in America's fight against terrorism. More than 2,100 soldiers have died in Iraq since the war began in March of 2003.

"Every time you hear of a soldier dying, you just feel terrible. You don't know how it feels, unless you have lost yourself. So my heart goes out to them every time we lose another one," she said.

If nothing else, those losses should be reason enough for America to finish what it started in Iraq, she said.

"The right thing to do is to support our president and see this through. I just don't want to cut the chase without completing our mission," she said.

The Blumbergs say that Trevor's death has left a tremendous hole in their lives, but they have done their best to move on, all the while feeling extremely proud that he was their son.

"You have to go on with your life. If you let it, it will eat you up inside. You've got to go on or it will drive you nuts," Terry said.

Trevor Blumberg is buried in Michigan Memorial Cemetery in Flatrock. There is a brick dedicated to his memory at the Veteran's Memorial in Canton's Heritage Park. The memorial was built in 1993 and also contains brick pavers honoring 21 Civil War casualties, three from World War II and four from the Vietnam War.

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COX

FROM PAGE A1

ly recognized attorney based in Southfield, lambasted Cox for this investigation. Fieger said he couldn't believe that Cox was blaming him for his extramarital affair and called for Cox's resignation.

Cox said Fieger's name-calling merely diverts the public's attention from the allegations.

"Never before has anyone spent \$457,000 anonymously through using a dummy name, a dummy address and a dummy group," Cox said. "That's of a caliber that's never been seen before in Michigan."

The new year, Ballenger added, will provide a series of hurdles for Cox. His office has to continue the Fieger investigation in a fashion the public finds credible, which would maintain his party's loyalty and strengthen his re-election chances. If the Fieger investigation turns into a circus, Ballenger said, then things could spiral downhill for Cox.

"I think he will survive, but things have changed," he said.

FIRST TERM FEATS

As he tries to distance himself from the Fieger probe, Cox said he is trying to turn the public focus on the accomplishments of his first three

years in office. He reports the office has collected \$20.4 million in child support payments thus far to benefit 2,106 children, according to federal reports. In less than three years, federal reports indicate the attorney general collected nearly \$8.4 million in legal settlements for Michigan consumers, which is more than the \$8.3 million collected during Jennifer Granholm's term as attorney general (1999-2002).

His office has pushed utility companies to lower their original price proposals, which need state approval. Cox said his efforts provided Michigan residents a combined total savings of \$1.5 billion. With 515

employees in his department, Cox said he has enticed some utility companies to spread out natural gas payments over 17 months to help customers on fixed incomes who may struggle to cover this winter's sharp increase in energy costs.

"I like being able to solve problems and I get to do more in this job than I did when I was an assistant (Wayne County) prosecutor," Cox said. He's in the midst of initiating several new programs. He designed a program to educate senior citizens to protect themselves from identification theft.

He plans to intensify background checks for nursing home workers to better serve facility residents.

Cox, a 1980 graduate of Catholic Central, is seeking legislation that would provide whistleblower protection for health care workers who detect fraud while on duty, which he said will save the state money and provide the witness a reward while protecting his or her job. Also, Cox plans to follow suit with other state attorney generals and develop a Web site that requires all pharmacies to post their average prescription drug prices so consumers can compare.

"I just don't want the job to have the title," Cox said. "I want to do a couple things and we're doing them."



Mike Cox says his consumer protection efforts have been underrated.

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POLITICAL FALLOUT

While Cox aims to maintain fiduciary integrity, his political career could be dogged by a prolonged public battle between the attorney general's office and Fieger, said political analyst Bill Ballenger, editor of the Lansing-based publication *Inside Michigan Politics*.

"The situation certainly doesn't help him," Ballenger said.

"If we were just talking about an affair, I don't think that alone would be terminal. If Fieger keeps going on and on, and the publicity about this keeps coming, that could make it worse for Mike Cox."

Ballenger said Cox has received a political boost from Michigan Republicans who have been unified in their support of the attorney general since Cox admitted his infidelity Nov. 9 during a press conference with his wife of 11 years, Laura.

Before that time, Cox was expected to have little trouble winning re-election next year. Cox, 44, was considered a front runner for the Republican nomination for governor in 2010.

"Things were going well for him," Ballenger said. "He didn't have any problems with his own party and it was going to be tough for Democrats to find a good candidate to challenge him next year."

THE AG SPEAKS

Here are Attorney General Mike Cox's comments on various issues:

His endorsement of the Rev. Keith Butler (leader of a Southfield-based church) among three Republican candidates for U.S. Senate in 2006:

"He has a better chance to beat (incumbent) Debbie Stabenow among the three because he's better on the issues. His campaign is better organized, he has a better vision and he's an inspiration figure."

His love for politics:

"As a lawyer, the political arena is like the ultimate court room. It's a fascinating battle to make the better argument and come up with the better ideas."

President George W. Bush's program to secretly wiretap American citizens calling people in foreign countries:

"I'm uncomfortable with warrantless wiretapping of American citizens, but if they are involved conversations with people overseas who are possible terrorists, then that's within the president's powers as commander-in-chief."

Anticipating this week's scheduled leave for his Marine daughter, Lindsey (a 2001 Redford Thurston grad), who completed a 13-month assignment in Iraq earlier this year:

"It's been like a roller coaster ride. She's a strong individual, but still I would constantly worry. We were fortunate to get e-mails or calls from her every few days or so."

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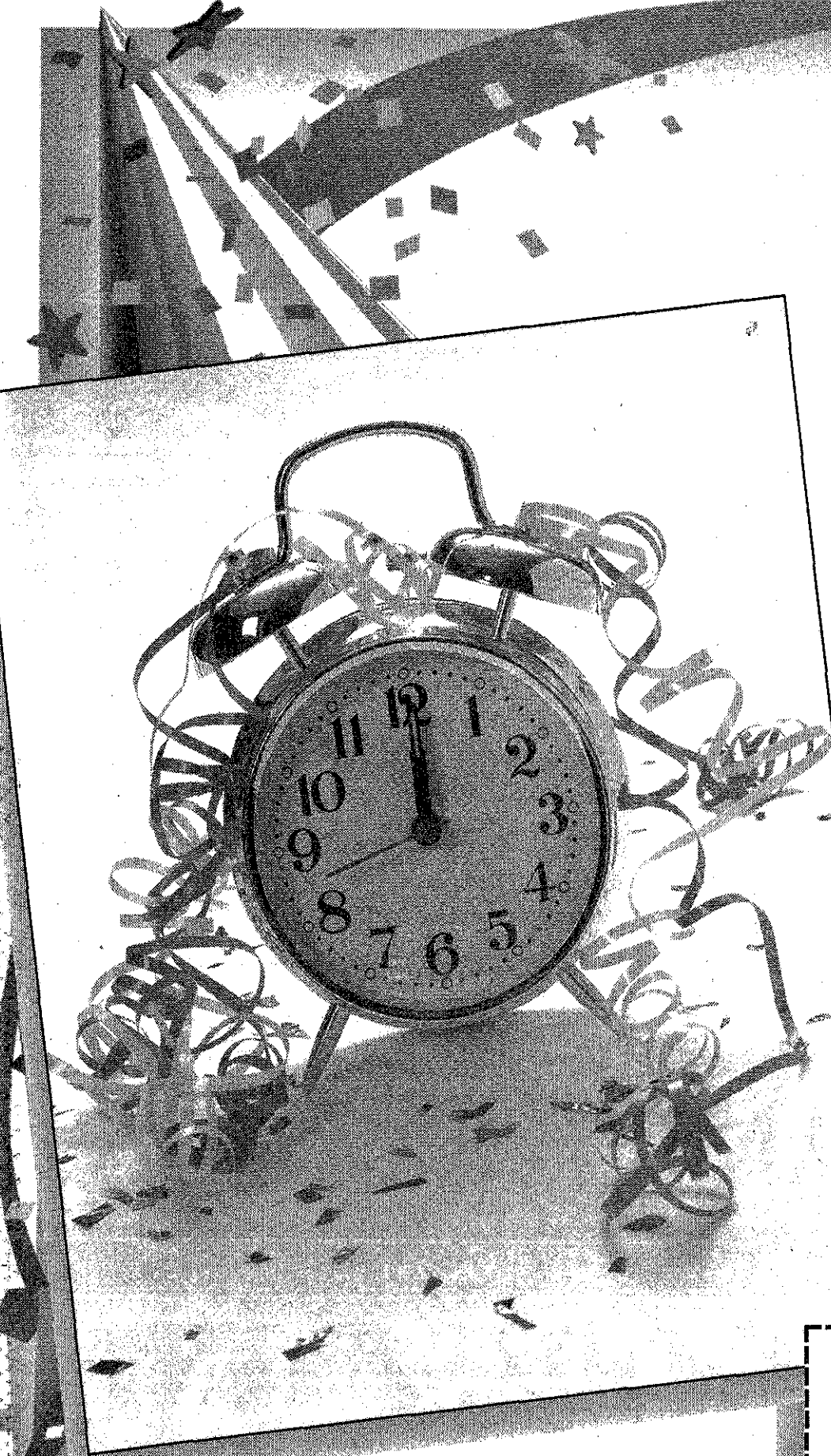
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ASH

FROM PAGE A1

ing." Ash been known to play two or three cards at a time - and win. She memorizes the cards or uses Braille cards to participate. And when she wins, she saves that bingo money for this time of year, when she can purchase gifts and host a holiday party at the center. This year, her winnings totaled \$271 and it went to a bevy of presents she handed out to everyone who came to the luncheon. Ash is already saving for next year's event. She's stashed about \$55 so far.

Gebhardt said the gifts were designated for women, men or staff members and each had a poem typed out and attached to the wrapping. "Everything rhymes," said Gebhardt. "She's just unbelievable. So talented."

Karl Peters, activity director for the center, said seniors look forward to the party every year. "It's a holiday tradition," said Peters. "She puts everyone in the spirit."

This year's event kicked off with a short skit including Ash's friends dressed as a Christmas tree, a snowman and two reindeer. Donning her Santa attire, Ash led the whole group in a rousing rendition of *Jingle Bells* and *We Wish You a Merry Christmas*. Her home-made sleigh even had a working door. Senior Center Volunteer Nancy Klein announced: "She went to Home Depot again."

Klein said she's known Ash for about two years and described her as "a very giving person, tenderhearted."

"She brings joy throughout the year," said Klein. "It's not just a seasonal situation. Just to see her everyday is inspiring."

Ron Hendry works in the library at the senior center. He said Ash adds humor and creativity wherever she goes. "She's a joy," he said. "She is so loved by so many."

Livonia residents Virginia Main and Doris Moyer agreed. They said they appreciated the party, and Ash. "She's amazing. Very generous," Moyer said.

Main added: "She blesses us just by being here. She touches our hearts."



Reindeer Beverly Gustafson (from left), snowman Mary Jamison, another reindeer Marie Sliwinski and Christmas tree Wanda Smith act out their parts in a Christmas play created by Santa, Livonia's Patty Ash.



Patty Ash (left) helps Mary Jamison complete her snowman costume for a play Ash created to entertain Livonia seniors.



Patty Ash of Livonia puts on her Santa gear in time for the party.

PHOTOS BY TOM HAWLEY | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

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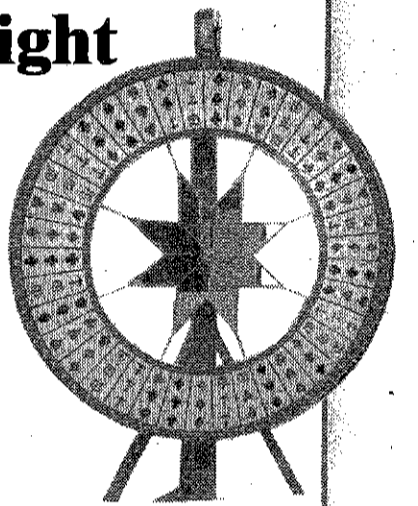
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Holidays can be lonely for those fighting addiction

BY BRAD KADRICH
STAFF WRITER

From her first days in college at Central Michigan University, when she was 18, 19 years old, Tina loved her vodka.

At first, she simply loved going to the parties, where the vodka and the atmosphere combined to give her a high she wasn't getting anywhere else. Then, she became the life of the party, always willing to go, always eager for a good time.

Eventually, the party became her life, a need that had to be filled, a sort of thirst only the partying, and particularly the vodka (and sometimes rum) could quench.

"I loved the feeling it gave me, the party atmosphere made me feel relaxed. It made me feel like I didn't have to worry about things," said Tina, now a 34-year-old Livonia resident. "There's a euphoria to it. Once I started, I wanted it more and more."

The problem was the degree to which the drinking had taken over her life. She didn't know it then, but she knows it now, after more than five years of sobriety. She figured, incorrectly, she knows now, since she'd never gotten into trouble — never been arrested, never been hurt — she didn't have a drinking problem.

She "bottomed out," she said, in March 2000, when she woke up one morning unable to recall how she'd gotten home, or how the dents got in the hood of her car or how the windshield got smashed.

Turns out, she'd hit an orange construction barrel, driving home during a blackout caused by her drinking. It turned out to be the watershed event of her life.

"I didn't think there was anything wrong with my drinking," Tina said. "I never got in trouble, never went to jail, none of that. Now, being in recovery, I can see how



Lillian Easterly is care ministries pastor at Northridge Church.

unmanageable my life was. Driving in a blackout ... I could have killed someone. I know people who have.

"When you're drinking, you don't make good judgment calls," she said. "I didn't want to have to be making up lies for things I did when I was drinking. I didn't want to be embarrassed and humiliated by what I was doing. My life was unmanageable."

Not any more. The morning after that event, more than five years ago now, Tina got some help, first from a friend she'd just met at her new church, then from a 12-step support group. She did 90 meetings in 90 days, called her sponsor every day and, most importantly, got involved in church.

As the holidays — with the party atmosphere that was such a huge part of Tina's life — approach, she spends her time now leading a support group of her own, The Women of Serenity, part of the LifeShare Ministries at Northridge Church in

Plymouth Township.

Getting support from groups like Tina's is a critical element to making it through party times such as the Christmas and New Year's holidays, according to Lillian Easterly, the Care Ministries pastor at Northridge.

It can be a dangerous time for recovering alcoholics and drug addicts.

"It's an extremely difficult time," said Easterly, herself a recovering alcoholic with 20 years of sobriety. "They're in recovery, trying desperately to stay sober, and they have to be around people who are still 'using.'"

That's how it was the first five years for Easterly, who found that time to be "very lonely," because, like most addicts, her friends, co-workers and others in her circle were part of her alcoholic world.

Easterly said the key to sobriety is finding a new world, at least at first.

"When you have an addiction, everyone in your life has

roles," Tina said. "They enable you. When I stopped, I had friends at church (instead)."

A LONELY TIME

Experts agree on one thing: A support system is vital, especially during a heavy party time like these holidays.

Experts agree the holiday season is a challenge for people recovering from substance abuse. According to Linda Cunin, director of Oakwood Healthcare System's Employee Assistance program, it's easy for addicts — even recovering ones — to let up during the holidays.

"Absolutely, because a lot of people associate celebrating with alcohol," said Cunin, a licensed master social worker. Those in recovery can get caught up in the holidays, she said, and not see their therapist or go to meetings such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous or Women for Sobriety. "You don't want to delude yourself into thinking 'Oh, I can stop by with my old drinking buddies.'"

Easterly presides over a series of support groups at Northridge that encompass some 350 people in its various elements. That includes two women's groups, including the one Tina leads, and three men's groups that deal

with drug and alcohol abuse.

With a party atmosphere like New Year's Eve around the corner, Easterly said Northridge will "provide a sober environment" to help people get through it, including meetings throughout the holidays.

Tina, with more than five years of sobriety, knows she's one of the lucky ones. She said one in 10 alcoholics seek help; only about 10 percent of those actually stick with it long enough to get it.

"There are a lot of people who go in and out and in and out (of support groups) because they don't do the steps," Tina said. "A lot of it is you're not used to having to deal with your feelings."

When you're in the throes of your addiction and you're drinking, it covers up the feelings. When you start working the steps, you find out a lot about yourself. A lot of people can't cope with that. "I had a huge, huge support system. I worked the program, had a sponsor, called the sponsor every day, went to the meetings," Tina said. "People don't stay sober because they think they can do it on their own. You can't do that."

Staff writer Julie Brown contributed to this story.

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been in that lifestyle," she said. "When you break out of that, you have to start over. It's a whole new life, and that makes it lonely."

Tina had those people in her life: The friend who told her what she'd done the night before, the ones who helped her craft stories to cover her drinking.

"When you're drinking, you have people who play their



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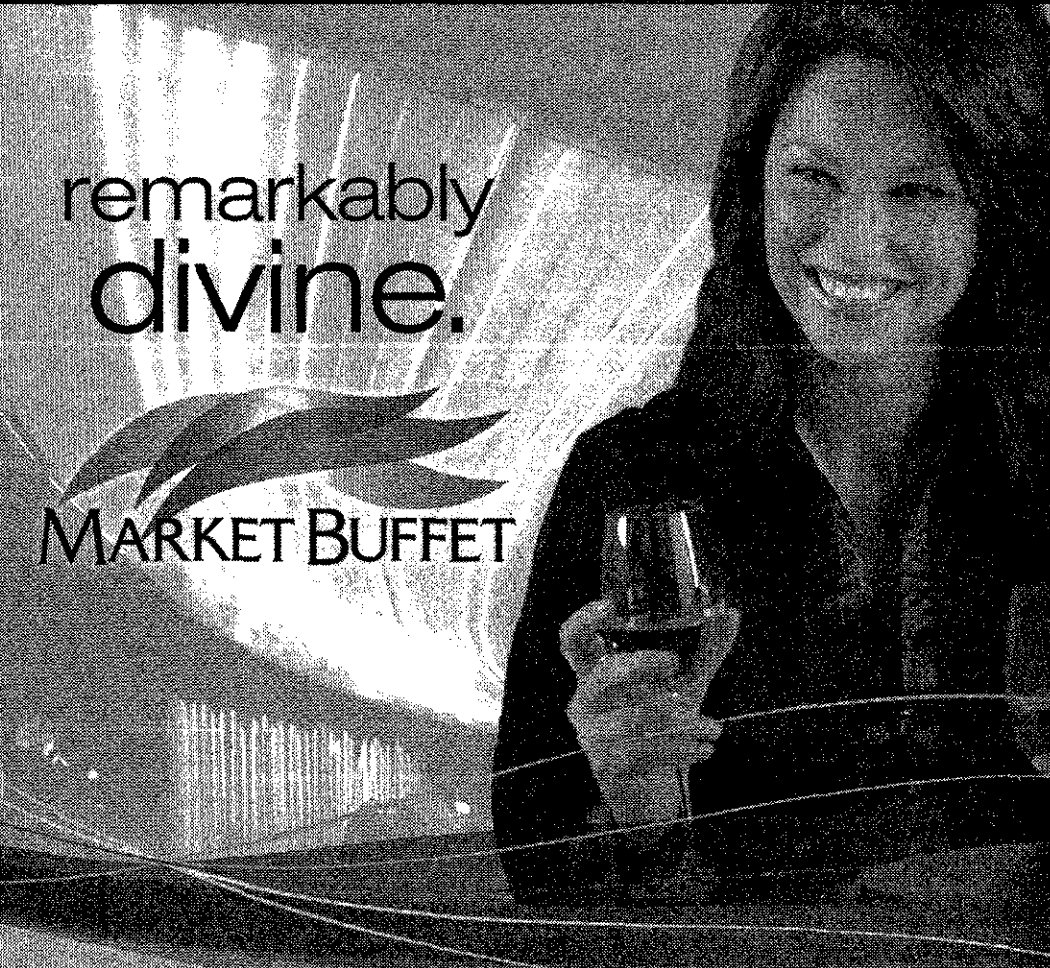
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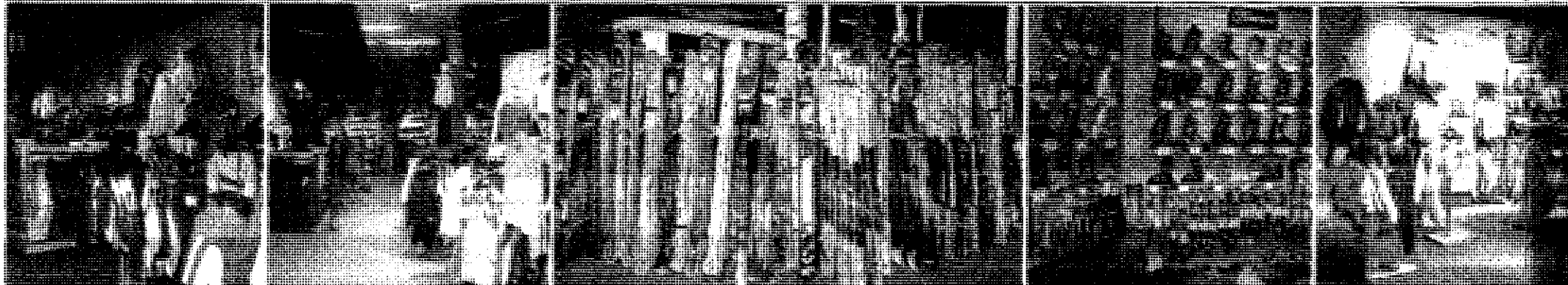
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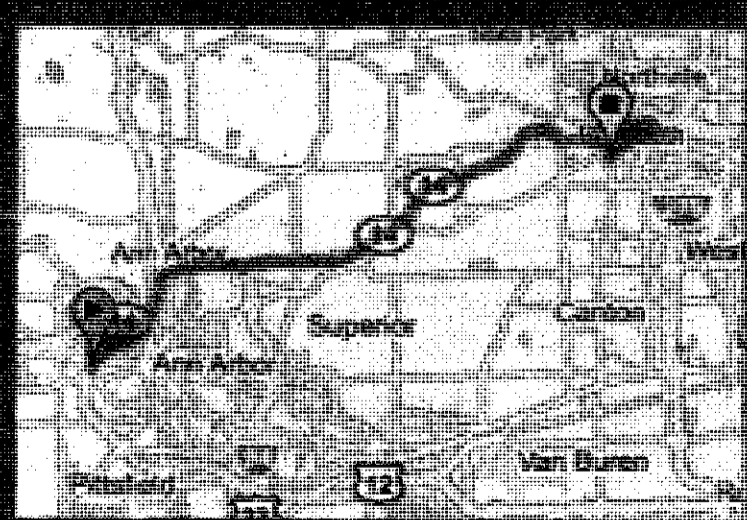
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Judge's ruling takes a stand for science and Constitution

On Tuesday, a Republican judge, appointed by President George W. Bush, took a stand for science, honesty and the Constitution by ruling that "intelligent design" could not be taught in biology classes in Dover, Pa.

Federal Judge John E. Jones III issued a detailed, fact-filled 139-page decision that included a strongly worded rebuke of the former Dover school board and those who championed their attempt to undermine science instruction in the Dover schools.

Jones said the school board members lied about their religious motives and made a decision of "breath-taking inanity" that "dragged their community into this legal maelstrom with its resulting utter waste of monetary and personal resources."

The Dover board, which was not re-elected by the voters of Dover after its bad decision, ordered that a statement be read at the start of the evolution portion of the the biology curriculum saying in part, "Because Darwin's Theory is a theory, it continues to be tested as new evidence is discovered. The Theory is not a fact. Gaps in the Theory exist for which there is no evidence." The statement went on to propose intelligent design was an equally legitimate scientific alternative and even endorsed a book on the subject. It concluded with a statement that implied evolution was only being taught to meet state standards.

Former Oakland County Prosecutor Richard Thompson, now president and chief counsel for the Thomas More Law Center in Ann Arbor, was the lead defense lawyer. He seemed particularly agitated by the depth, seriousness and vigor of Jones' decision. He took issue with the judgment involving "a one-minute statement" being read to students.

Clearly, the intent of that statement was to denigrate science research, distort the scientific meaning of the word theory and direct students to a religious-based idea in a public school program. So parents took the board to court.

Jones had some tough words for Thompson and his associates, who might wish to portray him as anti-religion or an "activist" jurist.

"Those who disagree with our holding will likely mark it as a product of an activist judge. If so, they will have erred as this is manifestly not an activist court," Jones wrote. "Rather, this case came to us as the result of the activism of an ill-informed faction on a school board, aided by a national public interest law firm eager to find a constitutional test case on intelligent design, who in combination drove the board to adopt an imprudent and ultimately unconstitutional policy."

To be clear, scientific theory as understood by scientists is, from the American Heritage Dictionary definition "a set of statements or principles devised to explain a group of facts or phenomena, especially one that has been repeatedly tested or is widely accepted and can be used to make predictions about natural phenomena."

Theories arise from tested hypotheses and are always open to challenge and new understanding based on testable observations.

Intelligent design and creationism have no such scientific foundation and are rooted in a belief in a "creator," understood by its proponents as the "creator" of the Judeo-Christian heritage. This is not something open to scientific inquiry, but a matter of faith.

In 2001, state Rep. Robert Gosselin (R-Troy) offered his own bill to inflict this quasi-science on Michigan students, following similar actions in Kansas. His proposal would have read into the state standards: "In the science standards, all references to 'evolution' and 'how species change through time' shall be modified to indicate that this is an unproven theory by adding the phrase 'all students will

explain the competing theories of evolution and natural selection based on random mutation and the theory that life is the result of the purposeful, intelligent design of a Creator."

Gosselin has also proposed posting the Ten Commandments, which in addition to good advice about not killing, stealing, coveting or cheating, also promote the worship of God and keeping sacred the sabbath. These are good things and, as recently interpreted by the U.S. Supreme Court, fine to display in a limited, historical, cultural context, but not as a statement of the state's views.

The ruling by Jones is not "anti-religion." It is pro-science. It is a statement that a public school biology classroom is not the place for advocating a particular religious point of view.

In a column in Wednesday's New York Times, Bruce Feiler argues that the decision might be helpful in returning the Bible to where it belongs, not in science classes, but in "elective, nonsectarian high school Bible classes." Feiler, who spoke at the Livonia Prayer Breakfast last year and is the author of several perceptive and entertaining books on the Bible, argues that the Bible is a great work of literature and religious philosophy and holds a significant place in our shared cultural history.

The Supreme Court has always upheld this approach to teaching about the Bible and about the importance of religion in our country's history.

As Feiler says, "the Bible is too important to the history of Western civilization — and too vital to its future — to be ceded to one side in the debate over values."

And it's time that a small minority within the Christian community stops trying to find devious ways to impose its religion on others through government sanction.

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Fun, safe: Friends don't let friends drive drunk

The response came as a surprise. I'd called Nechole McClendon, executive director at Wayne County's Mothers Against Drunk Driving, about the annual New Year's Eve program. For 20 years, the MADD chapters in the metro area have joined forces to offer free New Year's rides home to revelers who've had too much. I thought this year's story would be much like last year's.

Project LifeRide is continuing this year, McClendon told me, but in a reduced form. Coupons for \$2 off rides home are being passed out to bars and nightclubs, unlike the volunteer-manned bank of past years which coordinated free rides home.

She said it wasn't the economy to blame but rather that revelers had become too dependent: "The public had become dependent on MADD

providing the service. We wanted to make sure the public respected our volunteers. We just want people to be responsible."

Law enforcement folks I talked to were circumspect in reaction, but I can't imagine they're happy about their New Year's workload becoming that much heavier. I decided to call Dale Yagiela, executive director of Growth Works Inc., which among other things works with young people who are chemically dependent.

"I doubt that many people took them up on their offer to start with," said Yagiela, who's seen a number of other efforts to make people, including those who work in bars and restaurants, aware of their responsibilities. "I think all these things are really important. There's a tremendous amount of effort that's put into this."

He's found that those who cause drunken driving crashes aren't necessarily in tune with such things as getting rides home.

They may be alcoholics and often don't hold valid driver's licenses.

Yagiela has found young people now abuse more prescription drugs, especially opiates, as revealed by ongoing University of Michigan research. "That to me is a bigger concern," said Yagiela, who noted continued marijuana use and abuse of over the counter medications

among teens. It's been more than 30 years since I got my driver's license — and certainly my generation had its share of substance abuse problems — but I hope New Year's revelers of all ages get the message this year. The MADD rides were a big help and it's a shame to see them go; hopefully, they'll be back in time for next year's New Year's Eve celebration.

Preventing even one drunken driving tragedy is worth it. The Michigan Office of Highway Safety Planning is coordinating the "You Drink & Drive. You Lose." crackdown, Dec. 19 to Jan. 1, to combat drunken driving and prevent traffic deaths. Twenty-eight counties across the state are receiving federal traffic safety funding for overtime drunken driving patrols, and hundreds of other agencies are pledging to make enforcement a priority.

In Livingston, Macomb, St. Clair and Wayne counties, 22 law enforcement agencies will receive grant funds to patrol on Dec. 19-23 and Dec. 29-Jan. 1.

During the 2004 Christmas weekend there were four traffic fatalities, one of which involved alcohol, according to the Michigan Department of State Police, Criminal Justice Information Center. Six people died in traffic crashes over the New Year's weekend, and four of the deaths were alcohol-related.

There's a lot you can do if you're hosting a party. Serve plenty of food to reduce the likelihood of guests becoming intoxicated. Offer plenty of nonalcoholic drinks too, and be sure no guest leaves your party intoxicated and intending to drive. You can put them up for the night if necessary.

If you're out at a bar or restaurant Dec. 31, a designated driver's the way to go. When you do head home, pay extra attention while on the road to guarantee that everyone gets home safely. That's particularly the case if the weather's bad, a distinct possibility with our Michigan winters.

Few would advocate a return to Prohibition, which brought problems of its own, but drunken driving is an easier call. Have a good time this New Year's but don't let your celebrating turn into a tragedy, for you, your family or anyone else.

Julie Brown of Plymouth Township is presentation editor for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. She can be reached at (734) 953-2111 or jcbrown@hometownlife.com.



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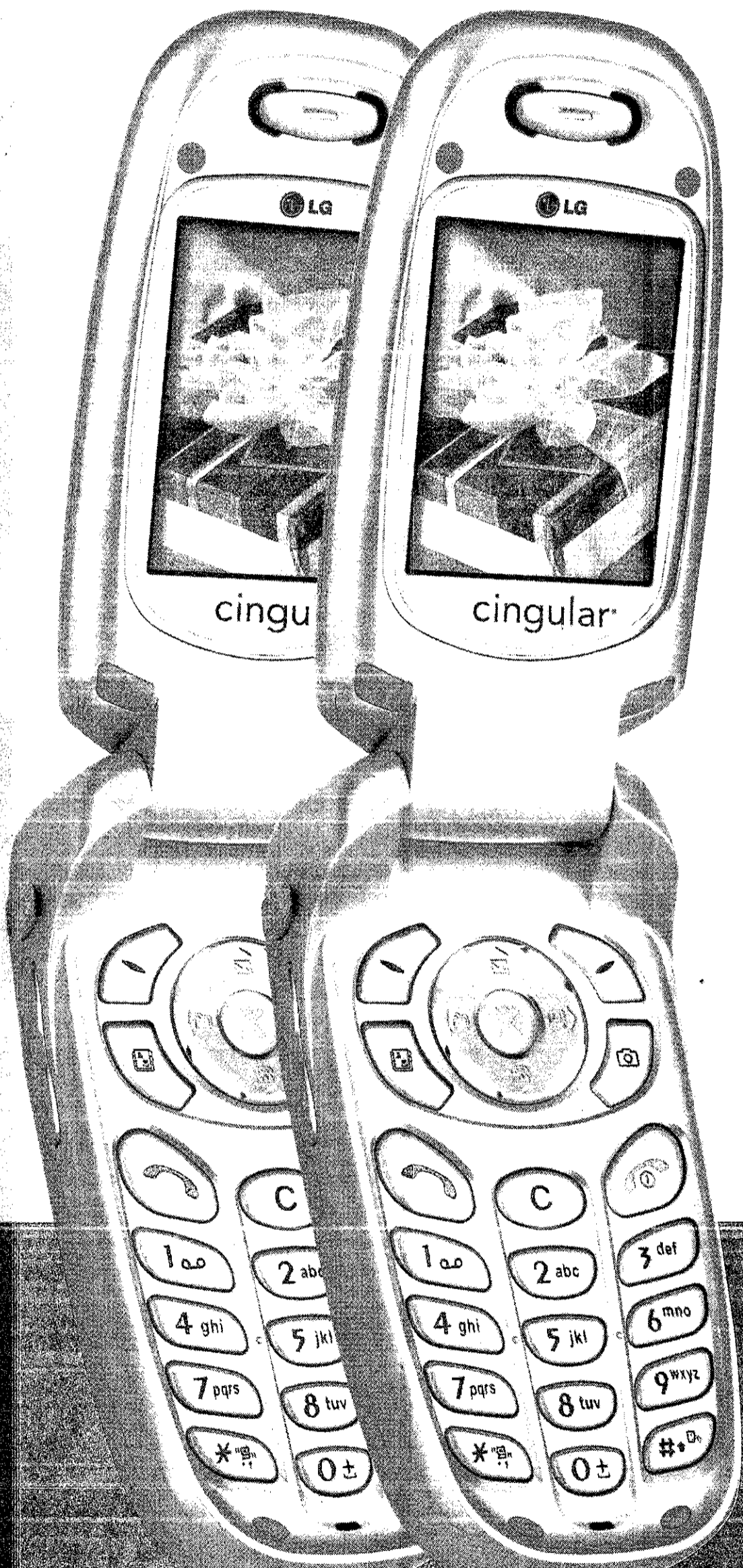
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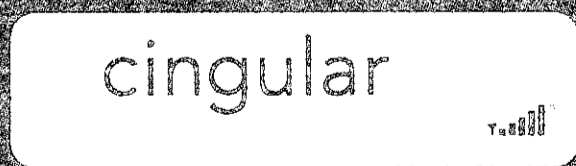


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