

12/17



## 'A Galaxy of Stars': Observer All-Area teams for fall prep sports inside today

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SUNDAY  
December 17, 2006

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## Opinion provides road map to filling vacancies

BY SUE MASON  
STAFF WRITER

When Westland voters go to the polls next November, they may find themselves having to vote for the same city council candidate twice.

That's just part of what City Attorney Angelo Plakas says needs to be done to handle vacant council positions that will occur after the first of the year.

Plakas in an opinion prepared in response to a request from council President William Wild, said the council will have to address the vacancies created with the resignations of Councilman Richard LeBlanc and Mayor Sandra Cicirelli at its first meeting in January. Cicirelli is leaving her position to become a judge in 18th District Court, while LeBlanc will represent the city in the state House of Representatives.

"I'm glad I asked for the opinion," said Wild. "I think it clears up any misconceptions and shines a light on the council appointments. I think the opinion is pretty clear and concise and we should be able to execute it."

Plakas said the council should follow Charter Section 4.6 in filling the vacancies and that Wild should place on the council agenda the nomination and appointment of a council member and mayor as well as a nomination and appointment of a person "to fill the vacancy, if any that may result from the appointment of the mayor."

He also recommends that the group address the council vacancy before taking up the mayoral position. "As a practical matter, it would be beneficial to schedule the nomination and appointment of the vacant council position first so that councilman can be sworn in and a full City Council of seven mem-

bers can participate in filling the vacancy in the office of Mayor," Plakas stated in the opinion.

In filling the mayoral position, he determined that all members of the council are eligible to be appointed to the job and that there is no charter provision barring a council member from voting for himself or herself to fill vacant office.

As council president, Wild will serve as mayor pro tem until the meeting and could be appointed to complete the remaining three years of Cicirelli's term. According to Plakas, he can nominate and participate in voting to fill the vacant elected office.

The resident selected to replace LeBlanc will serve until the city election in November when voters will elect a person to fill out the remainder of the term. But, according to Plakas, the ballot "must include two elections for the office - one to fill the remainder of LeBlanc's term which expires at the

end of 2007, and one to fill the new term which begins in January 2008."

It would be the same case for the vacancy created, if Wild is appointed mayor. His current term also expires in 2007.

"That part was surprising, I wasn't expecting that," said Wild. "I think what Angelo recommended is the best way to do, it's the cleanest way to do."

According to Wild, at least a "half dozen" residents have already submitted resumes and like amount have indicated verbally that they are interested in serving on the city council.

Potential appointees must have lived in Westland at least two years prior to the potential appointment as well as be a registered and qualified voter of the city.

[smason@hometownlife.com](mailto:smason@hometownlife.com) | (734) 953-2112



Ethan McKarge delivers gift cards and Bibles to Eleanor Clay (from right), Eileen Cox and Marguerite Waegner at the Christmas for Seniors party at the Dorsey Center.

## Gift cards put smiles on seniors' faces

BY SUE MASON  
STAFF WRITER

Christmas came early to Eleanor Clay, Eileen Cox and Marguerite Waegner, who were on the receiving end of Meijer gift cards from a group that simply goes by the name of The Club.

"This is very important, \$125 is very good," Cox said. "I'm very grateful. I won't be buying any fancy stuff."

"Mine's going for all food," Waegner added.

The three women were among 48 senior citizens in Westland selected to receive the gift cards at a small party at the Dorsey Center in Westland last Monday afternoon.

"This makes it all worthwhile, and for me it's all worthwhile because this is what we're supposed to do," club member Lorena Dugger of Livonia said. "It's very touching to see, very

emotional."

This is the second year The Club has given out gift cards, financed from money raised at a charity dinner held in November and \$500 donation from the Westland Meijer store.

The recipients are senior citizens who are on Section 8 (subsidized) housing in Westland.

"We picked the neediest," said Karen Willing, who works in Westland's Community Development Department. "Some are from last year, some are new this year."

The seniors each received a Bible and the gift card at the party. The Bibles were donated by Heidi and Brian Bates of Plymouth, who knew about the gift cards and wanted to purchase the books.

"She drove to Southfield to get them and we put the cards in the chapter of Luke where the



Francis Jackson and Hilda Neely (right) open up their Christmas cards to find \$125 Meijer gift cards inside.

"One woman gasped, grabbed her chest and started crying. She expected \$15 and was hoping for \$25. We had some who said, "You just don't know how wonderful this is."

Lorena Dugger

PLEASE SEE GIFT CARDS, A6

## District's revenues, spending increase for '06-07 budget

BY SUE MASON  
STAFF WRITER

The bottom line is better than expected, at least for now, in the Wayne-Westland Community Schools.

According to a budget amendment approved by the school board earlier this month, the district will take in an additional \$1.07 million, boosting revenues to \$117.1 million for the 2006-07 budget year. Expenses also will be up an additional \$789,000, translating into a lower budget deficit.

According to Gary Martin, deputy superintendent for

administrative and business services, the district had planned to use \$3.2 million of its fund equity to cover its revenue shortfall, but the figure is now \$2.9 million.

"We'll have a \$13.9 million end balance which is 11.5 percent of budget, slightly below what the auditors would like to see," said Martin in presenting the amendment to the school board.

A bulk of the added revenue is due to a larger than projected student enrollment, according to Linda Kempton, executive director of business and operations. School aid and local property

PLEASE SEE BUDGET, A6

## County awaits results of free lead testing

It will be another week before Wayne County health officials have results of blood tests of more than 90 people tested earlier this month.

Wayne County health officials had indicated the results would take one-two weeks, and Alan Helmkamp, assistant Wayne County executive, is hoping to have the results of blood tests done on Dec. 6 before the Christmas holidays.

Health workers also were at the Bailey Recreation Center last Wednesday to test people for exposure to lead. According to Helmkamp, 25 adults and 15 children were tested.

"I think the folks who were most concerned and the most interested participated in the testing," he said.

Helmkamp added that the higher numbers of people tested on Dec. 6 may have been due to a children's tree decorating event held at the time of the testing.

"The first day, the people most motivated to be tested were there, and there were those who were at the tree decorating who saw the testing and decided to take advantage of it."

The testing arose after it was revealed in early November that city and county officials knew for years but kept quiet about elevated levels of lead, particularly on the Central City Park ball diamonds. City and Wayne County officials recently talked with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality about the latest tests which again found elevated levels of lead in an L-shaped area going from the ball diamonds to the soccer fields, Helmkamp said. The new results parallel earlier findings, he said.

"The results are consistent with the first areas where they found lead," said Helmkamp. "It will help refine the geographic area for remediation."

By Sue Mason

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Coming Thursday in Filter

Winter fun: Need to keep the in-laws entertained this holiday season? The next issue of Filter will list suggestions.

# Psychologist gets 11 years for soliciting sex with girl

A Livonia-based psychologist was sentenced to just over 11 years in federal prison on charges that he solicited sex from a young girl.

Dr. Charles Fraelich, who had pleaded guilty to two charges, was sentenced on Dec. 14 in Georgia by Judge Beverly Martin. The sentence also included 10 years of supervised release, a \$2,000 fine and \$200 in court costs, according to a court spokeswoman.

On July 20, Fraelich pleaded guilty to the charge of using the Internet to entice a minor into criminal sexual activity, and the charge of crossing a state line with the intent to engage in a sexual act with someone younger than 12 years old.

Fraelich, an Ann Arbor resident who had a psychology office near Laurel Park Place Mall, has been held in a federal prison in Georgia without bond since he was arrested April 20. He was 58 when he was arrested.

Federal investigators said he traveled to the Atlanta area with the intention of meeting a 33-year-old woman and her 11-year-old daughter for sex.

Fraelich set up the meeting after several Internet conversations and a telephone call with an undercover agent who portrayed the mother.

Investigators said Fraelich had boasted about previous three-way encounters with two other young girls and their mothers.

Fraelich had worked with children in Livonia.

He was once on a referral list of psychologists provided by the Livonia Public Schools, though he was never employed or contracted by the district. His name was removed after the arrest.

By Dave Varga

# Kids' homemade ornaments decorate trees

The pine trees around Westland City Hall are dressed to the T for the holidays, thanks to school children and scout groups who gathered with Mayor Sandra Cicirelli for her annual tree decorating.

Bagels slathered with peanut butter and honey and bird seed and paper chain garlands were among the festive homemade holiday trimmings used to decorate the pine trees that line the walkway between City Hall and the Bailey Recreation Center.

Twelve Westland schools participated, many with several classes and scout troops pitching in to hang the edible ornaments.

Joyful Noise led the group in singing Christmas carols outside and performed for the crowd inside the Bailey Recreation Center where youngsters enjoyed hot chocolate, cookies and crafts.

The music group is sponsored by the First United Methodist Church of Belleville and has been performing around 35 years. One of its special features is the trumpet player who plays songs on a coffee pot.

And the longest line was to visit with a special guest - Santa Claus - who waiting to meet with them.

The tree decorating event was just one of several holiday happenings geared to youngsters in the community that's hosted by the mayor.

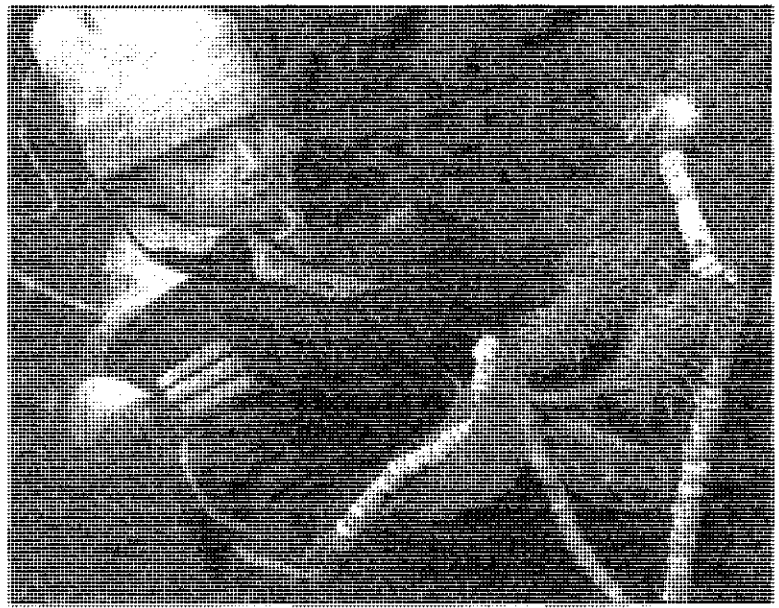
**Joyful Noise led the group in singing Christmas carols outside and performed for the crowd inside the Bailey Recreation Center where youngsters enjoyed hot chocolate, cookies and crafts.**



P.D. Graham second-graders Makayla Radiwon, 7, (foreground) and Alexis Bruster, 7, (behind), members of the Brownie Troop 246, place paper chains around one of the trees outside the Bailey Recreation Center.



Brianna Chevalie, 6, a member of Brownie Troop 246 at P.D. Graham Elementary, and her mother Danielle greet Santa Claus at the decorating event.



Brownie Tori Batko, 7, of Troop 793 at Edison Elementary, places a string of Fruit Loops and Cheerios onto the tree.

PHOTOS BY TOM HAWLEY | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

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# Candles put glow on memories

## Vigil allows parents to remember children

BY BRAD KADRICH  
STAFF WRITER

Jamie DeWitt was dating Andy Imielowski of Romulus when Andy died earlier this year.

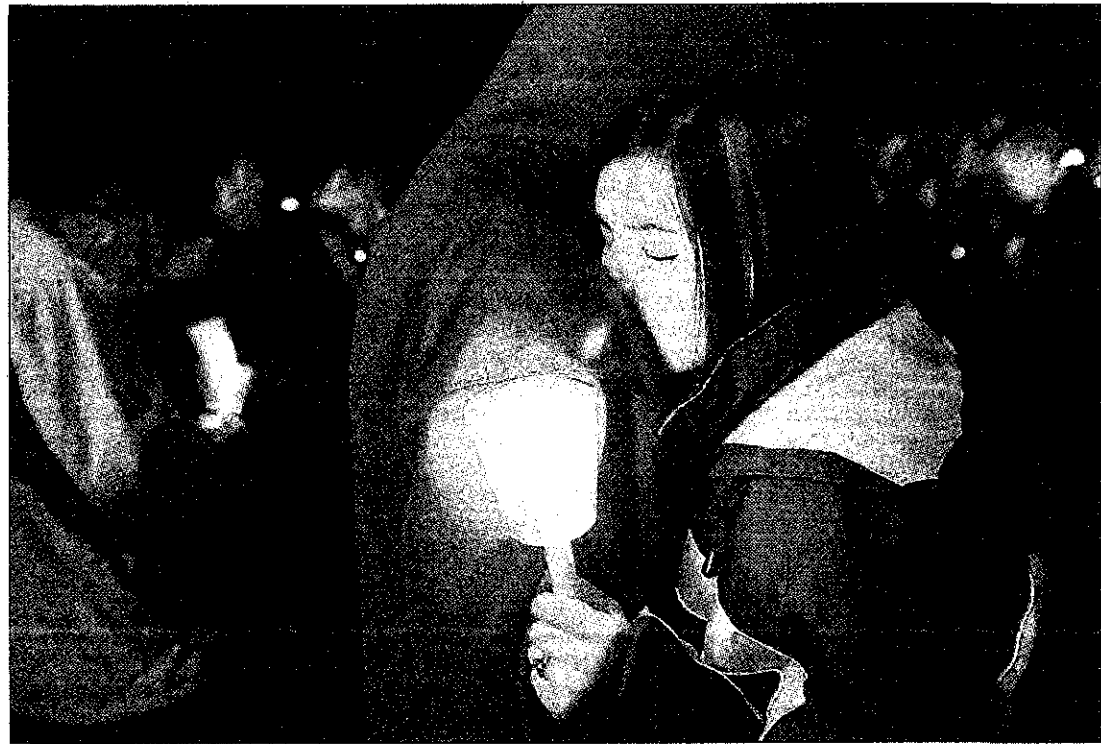
So when Andy's hearing-impaired parents, Monica and Roman Imielowski, learned about The Compassionate Friends' candlelight vigil to remember children who have died, DeWitt, a sign language expert, knew she had to be there, too.

DeWitt, and more than 500 others, were in Kellogg Park recently for the annual vigil, which brings together The Compassionate Friends chapters from around the world to form a ring of candles around the globe to honor children lost too soon.

DeWitt stood onstage, fighting back the emotion and interpreting everything from the poems that were performed to the reading of nearly 300 names of children.

"To be here ... it's hard to explain," DeWitt said. "To be a part of something I wish I didn't have to be a part of, and to be able to bring some special emotion (for Andy's parents) is wonderful. This is very personal for me."

It was personal to a lot of



PHOTOS BY HEATHER ROUSSEAU | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Ashley Trent hugs her boyfriend Nick Rust, both of Westland, mourn the loss of their friend, Eric Storer, during the Compassionate Friends Candlelight vigil.

people. According to Gail Lafferty, the Canton woman who is the group's co-leader, The Compassionate Friends bought some 500 candles to be used in the vigil, but that wasn't enough.

The program included poems read by parents who have lost children, along with the songs *Who You'd Be Today* by Kenny Chesney and *To Where You Are* by Josh Groban. In addition, Lafferty and Pat O'Donnell of Westland read nearly 300 names of children who have died.

All of it was designed to

help parents, families and friends remember the children they've lost.

"People are struggling so much through the holidays," Lafferty said. "This just helps."

Judith Gangnier of Farmington lost her son, Beau, earlier this year. She heard about The Compassionate Friends from a woman whose son is buried in the same cemetery, and she decided she had to go.

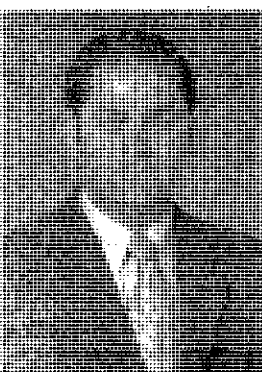
"I love my son, I miss my son, and it helps to be able to talk to people about that," Gangnier said. "Most people feel uncomfortable talking

about it. The Compassionate Friends don't. This is real important to me."

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Kathleen George of Westland holds a candle for her niece, Adel Smith, during The Compassionate Friends candlelight vigil last Sunday in Plymouth.



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# ATHENA nominations sought

Do you know a man or woman who has assisted women in realizing their full leadership potential? Have they demonstrated excellence, creativity and initiative in their business or profession and contributed time and talent to help improve the quality of life for others in the community? Then that someone could be the next Westland ATHENA Award recipient.

Nominations are currently being accepted for the award, which will be presented at the Westland ATHENA Award Chocolate Fantasy Evening Saturday, Feb. 10.

The award honors an exceptional individual who has achieved excellence in her/his business or profession, has served the community in a meaningful way and has assisted women in their attainment of professional goals and leadership skills.

The ATHENA Award was first presented in 1982 in Lansing and has grown to include presentations to more

than 5,000 individuals in hundreds of cities in the United States as well as in Canada, China, Russia and the United Kingdom.

Previous honorees have included Charlotte Sherman, deputy superintendent of educational services for the Wayne-Westland Community Schools, and Joan Carr, founder of the Red Wagon literacy program.

The Westland recipient will be invited to join the thousands of ATHENA Award Recipients worldwide along with other business owners and professionals at the annual International ATHENA Leadership Conference in Chicago, Ill., in April 2007.

Nominations can be made through Friday, Jan. 27. Nomination forms are by contacting the Women of Westland at 5719 N. Berry, Westland, MI 48185 or by calling (734) 467-9113.

The ATHENA Award Program is nationally underwritten by General Motors and National City Bank.

## INFORMATION CENTRAL

### HOLIDAY TRADITIONS

What says Christmas better than firing guns off outside your neighbors' homes? It may not sound festive, but the practice was not unheard of in the 1800s. Groups of men used to go around the neighborhood firing guns until they were invited inside for refreshments.

Instances of this tradition have been reported in Indiana, Missouri, Iowa and South Carolina.

While this tradition may not be your cup of tea, there are many holiday traditions that you might enjoy adding to your rotation. Or if you are content with the holiday traditions you already have, maybe the William P. Faust Public Library of Westland can help you with those.

Since Americans come from countries all over the world, many Christmas traditions can be traced back to our ancestry. In Holland, all presents must be wrapped in such a way that the contents are a complete mystery.

Denmark publishes a Christmas stamp every year and people tend to over-stamp their envelopes since the stamp supports charity.

In Romania, boys go from house to house reciting poetry and singing carols.

In Israel, where Hanukkah is the national holiday, runners participate in a relay race.

One runner begins in Modin and passes the torch to another runner and so on until the torch reaches Jerusalem's Western Wall. There, the chief rabbi uses it to light the giant menorah.

To learn more about holiday traditions, come in and check out some books like *The Folklore of World Holidays*, *The Book of Festivals and Holidays the World Over*, *Christmas in America* or *The Folklore of American Holidays*.



For help boosting your own holiday traditions, come grab up some holiday CDs, such as *The Carols of Christmas*, *A Taste of Chanukah* or even *Kwanza Music*. For the very talented, come borrow a book of holiday sheet music and play your own carols.

There's plenty for chefs, too. Try *Betty Crocker's Christmas Cookbook*, *The Christmas Cookie Book* or *Holiday Cooking*.

Crafty people shouldn't feel left out either. We have a plethora of books on holiday craft projects, including *Hanukkah Crafts*, *Decorating Your Home for Christmas* and *Quick and Easy Christmas Bazaar Crafts*.

So whether you are looking to learn more about the history of your traditions, learn about the traditions of your friends and neighbors of other faiths, or just bring some new music or recipes to your own holiday celebrations, the William P. Faust Public Library is the place to be!

### Highlighted Activities

**Internet 101:** 2 p.m. Dec. 21. For the very beginner; what the Internet is, and how to get there.

**Internet 201:** 7 p.m. Dec. 27. An "inside look" at Internet search engines - which ones do what, how to evaluate them, how to choose good Web sites. No registration or fee required.

Information Central is compiled by Bridget Sturdy, young adult librarian at the William P. Faust Public Library, 6123 Central City Parkway, Westland. For more information, call (734) 326-6123.

## WAYNE HIGH ACADEMIC LETTERS

Receiving Academic Letters at Wayne Memorial High School were:

**Ninth Grade**  
 Muhammad Ali, Caitlin Badrak, Shirelle Bailey, Madelynn Bevil, Brooke Bishop, Brandie Bishop-Stacker, Shereen Blair, Colleen Blake, Brittany Blanton, Kelsey Blevins, Danielle Boston, Christopher Burtraw, Danielle Capraro, Kimberly Chau, Melissa Chesnut, Krystle Crandall, Samantha Dye, Jessica Eaves, Heather Favazza, Matthew Foss, Ryan Gabriel.

Zachary Girouard, Donald Herber, Janessa Hudson, Ashley Hunt, Gabrielle Jackson, Cassandra Jordan, David Kautz, Chapin Kibitewski, Elgin Kodra, Nicholas Kostora, Taylor Krohn, Tabitha Kujat, Alyssa Lucas, Kyle Maier, Zachary Martin, Chelsea Miller, Monique Miller, Matthew Mills, John Moore, Michael Morgan, Allen Nugal, Steven Ogg, Utonia Overstreet.

Candace Papineau, Daniel Pianowski, Amanda Poirier, Curtis Simpson, Solomon Shurge, Eric Story, Ashley Struppa, Nicholas Tarnowsky, Jacob Tenerovich, Matthew Thompson, Taylor Tuttle, Nancy Watson, Jordan Weatherwax, Carla Weimert, Justin Willis and Natalie Yambrick.

**10th Grade**  
 Autumn Askew, Amanda Bailey, Hailey Benton, Ryan Bird, Fawna Black-Cicotte, Danielle Borg, Joshua Bradley, Michael Cole, Corey Campbell, Nova Connolly, Linette Cuevas-Zuniga, Jordan Doltor, Kevin Erdmann, Kenneth Ester Jr., Kherre Fairbanks, Marian Farmer, Bailly Floyd, Daniel Frey, Heather Gendron, Nastassia Goines, Justin Guenther.

Thomas Gunther, Kristine Haggard, Cory Harden, Heather Henning, Elyse Henry, Jordan Holland, Kelli Hughes, Chase Kelly, Sharon Langa, Jeanette Laskowski, Monica Lewis, Alyssa Luckett, Kristen Malkiewicz, Rebecca Miller, Kristina Monty, Amber Mornear, Claire Moro, Jillian Novak Alexander, Colleen O'Brien, Serrina O'Brien-TarazandePou, Andrew Pate.

Brent Patterson, Erica Perdue, Chelsea Quintal, Chelsea Randies, Johnny Reid, Virginia Reid, Emily Rodler, Melissa Schmidt, Jacob Schofield, Melissa Smith, Michael Solazar, Sarah Sturm, Naja Tatum, Lauren Weinau, Joi Woolfork and Cassie York.

**11th Grade**  
 Kelsey Baker, Chelsea Cahill, Cassandra Campbell, Travis Cleveland, Daniel Crummey, Jennifer Dawson, Amber Decker, Kyra Dewyer, Erica Dishon, Jeremy Flatt, Julie Good, Adam Gorring, Michael Green, Meredith Griggs, Kathryn Hansen, Elizabeth Hardy, Samantha Hochstadt.

James Holbrook, Jason Hughes, Jessica Kay, Olivia LaFortune, Kevin Lewis, Linton Amanda, Karissa Matson, Sarah Mayberry, Andrew Maynard, Ronnie Meirtheu, Gabrielle Monit, Alyson Mosher, Kenneth Newsted, Ashley Parker, Nichole Pierson, Kristina Plummer, Andrew Ponican, LeJongna Reid, Michele Reske, Timothy Rundell, Joshua Samples.

Jasmen Sheffield-Sadle, Mengdian Shi, Desirée Simpson, Zachary Smith, Brittany Smith, Ashley Sullivan, Brett Tavana, Patricia Terrien, Kayleigh Thorne, Bobbi Turner, Kristi Tyler, Kiley Weber, Ashley Wellday, Marissa Williams, Steven Woodruff.

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 The Westland Observer - Publication NO. USPS 663-530 Published every Thursday and Sunday. Periodical postage is paid at Livonia, Michigan 48150.  
 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150  
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**Notice of Public Sale of Personal Property.**  
 Notice is hereby given that pursuant to Section 4 of the Self Service Storage Facility Act, State of Michigan, **PS Orangeo, Inc. and/or Shurgard TRS, Inc.** will conduct sale(s) at Public Storage located at 20080 Allen Rd. Trenton, MI 48034 (248)263-3880 12/28/2006 at 2:30 pm. Sales are for cash only. Removal within 24 hours. For sale and storage units in which rent and fees are past due.  
 Personal property described below in the matter of  
 1034- Cheryl Scrivner- lawn equipment, stereo, tires  
 1121- William Hubbard- 15 boxes, microwave, coffee table  
 137- Donna Alexander- dryer, vacuum, 8 totes  
 214- Jason Wozniak- bike, dining table, washer  
 241- Thomas Harvey- couch, tv, entertainment center  
 332- Chaunte Roberts- 10 boxes, kitchen chairs, TV  
 335- Carlon Construction- mattress set, ladder, entertainment center  
 417- Michael Rowell- box springs, mattress, china cabinet  
 637- Michael Sanderlin- 15 boxes, sofa, entertainment center  
 839- Stephen Pandel-dryer, stove, washer  
 Publish: December 10 & 17, 2006

**Notice of Public Sale of Personal Property.**  
 Notice is hereby given that pursuant to Section 4 of the Self Service Storage Facility Act, State of Michigan, **PS Orangeo, Inc. and/or Shurgard TRS, Inc.** will conduct sale(s) at Public Storage located at 3650 Enterprise Dr. Allen Park, MI 48101 (313) 441-3117 12/28/06 at 1:00 pm. Sales are for cash only. Removal within 24 hours. For sale and storage units in which rent and fees are past due.  
 Personal property described below in the matter of  
 A011 - Jenora Olaniran- mattress, 15 boxes, dryer  
 A016- Tracey Wilburn- mattress, microwave, TV  
 B012- Quineth Hill- mattress set, dresser, speaker  
 B023- Geneva Joubert- TV, dresser, sofa  
 B084 - Eric Melenon - mattress, box spring, vacuum cleaner  
 B104- Karen Kerrens-Madison - misc. items  
 B158 - Brandie Peoples - bags, totes  
 B176- Richard Harrington- mattress set, microwave, kitchen table  
 B233- Gloria Prim- TV, clothing, bags  
 B245- Sonya Dickens- sofa, loveseat, totes  
 B335- Danyelle Boykin- bags, 10 boxes  
 B339- Deloris Smith- bags, boxes, totes  
 B361- Daniel Page - boxes, misc. items  
 B381-Romare Redden-refrigerator, table, chairs  
 C013- James Scruggs - desk, dresser, toys  
 C014- Lynne Ray- washer, dresser, trunk  
 E025- Michael Knapp- Ac Unit, stereo, 2 trunks  
 E050- Deborah Keast- power tools, end table, TV  
 F025- Venida Chapman- bookcase, desk, microwave  
 F032- Antoine William- boxes, stereo, TV  
 F047- Brian Thiel- desk, golf club set  
 F049- Juanita Connolly- refrigerator, stove  
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 Personal property described below in the matter of  
 8013- Gary Carr- Toyota Truck- Vin # - JT4RNG3A2J0213986  
 Kawasaki Bike- Vin#- JKAENGA18F8A002714  
 6009- Rita Kraendlein- bike, boxes, computer  
 3042- Terrie Sherrard- dresser, ladder, toys  
 5043- Yvonne Blanding- bikes, filing cabinet, sofa  
 3041- Samuah Crawley- chair, couch, freezer  
 9092- Rick Doyle- bike, pictures, 30 totes  
 6034- Kevin Davanzo- sofa, desk, speakers  
 9014- Vivian Byrd- bags, totes, computer monitor  
 7135- Marlon Parry- 50 boxes, chair, sofa  
 7016- Jamie King- 20 boxes, sofa, dresser  
 6119- Sherre Roy- 30 boxes, chair, stereo  
 6107- Robert Kortas- mattress set, freezer, TV  
 6026- Patrick Sampson- sofa, power tools, refrigerator  
 5081- Reinhard Sendow- misc. items  
 5059- Jason Floyd- mattress set, boxes, totes  
 5039- Scott Winer- boxes, dresser, tool box  
 5037- Flowers by DeAvila- boxes, table lamp, freezer  
 5003- Dennis Pustel- mattress set, refrigerator, washer  
 4033- David Simmons- boxes, clothing, speakers  
 3091- Jason Dicks- mattress set, boxes, totes  
 3050- Becky Kirkland- mattress set, sofa, dining table  
 3022- Michael Howell- china cabinet, dresser, couch  
 2075- Marsh@Work Solutions- misc. cardboard totes  
 2043- Robert Peecher- 3 restaurant freezer, vending machines  
 Publish: December 10 & 17, 2006

## Bill lets government manage resources

The Michigan Senate Thursday approved legislation which would add cash-strapped local units of government by providing greater flexibility in how their financial resources are managed.

Senate Bill 868, sponsored by Sen. Laura Toy, R-Livonia, now goes to Gov. Jennifer Granholm for approval.

"My bill will enable local units of government to fund essential public services with surplus revenues that already exist without raising taxes," Toy said.

"Currently, these communities' hands are tied by state law."

Under state law, county treasurers are required to deposit certain revenues they receive into restricted funds which can only be used for specified purposes. Many counties have developed large surpluses in these restricted funds.

Toy's legislation allows county governments to transfer a portion of these surpluses to their general funds to pay for other services.

"This is a common sense measure to help local governments," Toy said. "I was proud to sponsor this important legislation."

**Notice of Public Sale of Personal Property.**  
 Notice is hereby given that pursuant to Section 4 of the Self Service Storage Facility Act, State of Michigan, **PS Orangeo, Inc. and/or Shurgard TRS, Inc.** will conduct sale(s) at Public Storage (formerly Shurgard) located at 24920 Trowbridge St., Dearborn, MI 48124 (313) 277-7940 on 12/28/06 at 1:30 pm. Sales are for cash only. Removal within 24 hours. For sale and storage units in which rent and fees are past due.  
 Personal property described below in the matter of  
 1090- Kirk Jackson- bike, boxes, and bags  
 1486- Paul Klingensmith- washer, dryer, tool boxes  
 1544- Be Da 1st Inc - misc. display cases  
 1550- Be Da 1st Inc - shelving, misc. boxes  
 1560- Benaurtsie Roland- entertainment center, computer, boxes  
 2314- Wayne Elsbrie- mattress set, tool box, boxes  
 Publish: December 10 & 17, 2006

**NOTICE OF PUBLIC SALE OF PERSONAL PROPERTY**  
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 On the premises where said property has been stored and which are located at Public Storage, 36001 Warren Ave., Westland, MI 48185 (734) 729-7095, on 1/2/2007 at 10:30 am.  
 Personal property described below in the matter of:  
 1268-Rutherford Renovations: Contractor supplies and tools  
 5160-Ibony Davis: lamp, microwave, couch  
 4078-Jennifer Andrew: Totes, refrigerator, boxes  
 3170-Joanna Hannum: Boxes, toys, baby crib  
 3110-James Craft: Curio, dresser, fan  
 3030-Don Fields: Snow blower, couch, freezer  
 3018-Mattie Card: TV, vacuum, chairs  
 1118-Cliff Gibson: Stereo, suitcase, clothing  
 On the premises where said property has been stored and which are located at Public Storage, 41877 Joy Rd., Canton, MI 48187 (734) 254-0243 on 1/2/2007 at 11:00 AM  
 Personal property described below in the matter of:  
 1016-Joshua Busa: Stereo, TV, couch  
 Publish: December 17 and 24, 2006

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**INVITATION TO BID**  
 Sealed proposals will be received by the William P. Faust Public Library of Westland, 6123 Central City Parkway, Westland, Michigan 48185, on or before **January 2, 2007 at 10:00 a.m.** (no exceptions) for the following:  
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**Scope of Work**  
 The contractor shall furnish all labor, equipment, materials and supervision required to properly maintain the carpet areas in an attractive condition throughout the term of the contract at the William P. Faust Public Library of Westland located at 6123 Central City Parkway, Westland, Michigan 48185  
 Proposals must be submitted by the time stated above or they will be returned. Please direct questions pertaining to specifications to Debbie Nogle at 734-326-6123. The William P. Faust Public Library of Westland reserves the right to reject any or all bids.  
 Debbie Nogle  
 Executive Assistant  
 Publish: December 17 & 21, 2006

# An event to remember

## Families' generosity provides Burger students with carnival

BY SUE MASON  
STAFF WRITER

The theme from *The Rifleman* mixed with Christmas carols as Westward Ho! met Santa Claus at the Burger Center for Students with Autism last week.

The event was the annual Christmas Carnival, a day-long celebration provided by the families of Jack Russo and Larry Berman.

"It was a perfect, perfect day," said Colleen Polin who helped orchestrate the annual event. "It was great. We made it a fun-filled day and a quality learning experience for the kids."

Hallways were decorated to fit the theme and with displays depicting aspects of the American West from famous individuals, famous events and the food that was eaten to the native Americans pioneers met while on the trail.

Students sampled jerky, cowboy drop cookies and cornbread, ate beans and franks and washed it all down with a drink at the Sarsaparilla Saloon.

"The guys in the hall had the beans and franks and jerky, and you have to have something to drink, so we went with sarsaparilla," said bartender Todd Fukudo. "We did some research and found that root beer was the closest to sarsaparilla. It was informative for the kids and for me, too."

A popular watering hole, by lunchtime, Fukudo had emptied seven three-liter bottles of root beer.

There also was areas depicting the fur trade with pelts students could feel and then try to identify the animal tracks, railroad tracks set up in one hallway to depict the transcontinental railroad, a covered wagon by the school office made by Darrell Smith, and a buggy in the gymnasium belonging to the grandfather - called Pa Glenn by students - of a teacher at the school. According to Polin, President Abraham Lincoln rode in the carriage.

Students had their faces painted, fed and petted the animals in the petting farm and rode ponies and horses. Chamberlain Animal Rides stayed well into the afternoon to make sure all students had an opportunity to ride one of the animals.

More than 700 people ate everything from beans and franks to fruit and chili, and Sheriff Joe Wilcox and his "deputies" manned the grills in the school courtyard grilling chicken and ribs for the crowd.

And the students also waited in line for one of the biggest attractions of the day -

Detroit Tigers pitcher Nate Robertson - who has been at previous carnivals to sign autographs.

"Nate called us, he just loves the kids," said Polin. "He asked, 'Do you think they want me back?' Of course."

Down one hall, a television was playing *The Rifleman* starring Chuck Connors. Next to it was the jail where those ordered arrested by students and staff had to make bail.

The money raised is earmarked for phone cards for military personnel serving in Iraq and to buy a brick paver at the Plymouth Community Veterans Memorial Park.

"They've done a lot with the veterans, but this is the first time they're doing something with park," said Bob Zaetta, president of the park committee, who was on hand to talk about the project.

Veterans have been a part of the winter event for years and were even the guests of honor for the patriotic Christmas Carnival several years ago.

According to Polin, "we more than reached our goal."

"We raised enough for the brick and a significant amount of money for the phone cards," she added.

At lunchtime, the staff and students paused to recognize their benefactors, the Russos and Bermans who have been providing both spring and Christmas parties and helping with projects at the center for more than 15 years.

Jack Russo heard about it from his barber who had a relative at Burger. He and his family got involved and eventually Berman, a longtime friend.

This year students thanked their benefactors by presenting them with wall hangings made of photographs of the children at the center.

"We wanted to create some beautiful memories," Polin told the guests. "Memories are what sustains us."

And while the school was thanking the two families, the Stefanko family, owners of Best Asphalt were honoring Russo by making a donation to the school.

"It was a significant amount, it was so generous," said Polin. "It'll go toward the party next year. It'll cover almost the entire thing."

"Through these families, our children are remembered and taken care of," she added. "The families want to give them a day to remember and I think they did it."

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PHOTOS BY TOM HAWLEY | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Cowgirl Charlotte Yaeger, 7, of Garden City takes a look at her painted kitty face done by Janice Priest of 2clowns at the Burger Center's annual Christmas Carnival. This year's theme was Westward Ho! (Ho-Ho).



Proud Tiger, Nick Bair, 13, of Canton holds up the pennant he made and the bubble gum signed by Detroit Tigers pitcher Nate Robertson.



Seth Brown, 8, of Canton tries on the coat of Captain Clark of the Lewis and Clark fame. Bud Clark (behind) brought period clothing for the children to try as part of the Winter Carnival.

Burger Center teacher Russ Mullen leads Principal Mary O'Neill to jail after arresting her.

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## BUDGET

FROM PAGE A1

taxes brought in an additional \$1.06 million with miscellaneous fees and tuition's accounting for an additional \$163,000.

However, money the district receives for its center-based special education programs was under projections by \$150,000.

"Schools of choice worked well for us, we got approximately 100 students," said Kempton.

On the expense side, the dis-

trict is spending an additional \$789,000, bringing the total to \$120.9 million for the year. The biggest portion will go for the purchase of eight new school buses. Expenses also have increased for salaries and benefits for teaching staff and for supplies and services related to increased enrollment and an additional \$50,000 for utilities.

While the bottom line is looking slightly better for the district, there are rumors of a possible proration of state school aid,

because of a shortfall in the state fund. The district receives \$7,781 per student in state school aid. Superintendent Greg Baracy has said that a proration could all but erase the positive effect of schools of choice with possible amounts running in triple digits.

"We've heard a whole gamut of things from no proration to a \$200 cut," said Kempton. "We'll just have to wait until January to see what happens."

smason@hometownlife.com | (734) 953-2112



## Big Help for MHS

Ron Blauet and his dog Chip met with members of the Big Help Club at Madison Elementary School recently to receive \$200 they raised for the Michigan Humane Society. The club sponsored a Pajama Day at school, with students paying \$1 to be able to wear their pajamas to school. The Big Help Club is composed of 20 fifth-grade students who meet weekly to discuss relative merits of supporting different charities and come up with ideas to raise funds. The Big Help Club is sponsored by school social worker Wendy Lyon.



## BACK ON THE JOB A WEEK AFTER HERNIA SURGERY

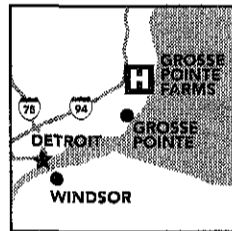


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## GIFT CARDS

FROM PAGE A1

Christmas story starts," Dugger said.

The seniors were delighted with the gifts.

"One woman gasped, grabbed her chest and started crying," Dugger said. "She expected \$15 and was hoping for \$25. We had some who said, 'You just don't know how wonderful this is!'"

The Club started many years ago in Dugger's living room. Eight women from as close as Canton and Northville to as far away as Hartland and Grand Blanc got together and wondered

how they could collect food for the needy.

They started out making food baskets for Boysville and then worked with an employee of the Wayne County Health Department in getting families to help before "hopping on the seniors' wagon."

"They're kind of the forgotten ones at Christmas," Dugger said.

Its latest effort is dubbed "Christmas for Seniors," and preparations start with a garage sale which this year raised \$2,200. The Club donated \$1,000 to two animal rescue organizations and used the rest as seed money for the charity dinner it put on in November at the senior Friendship Center.

Senior Resource Director Peggy Ellenwood donated use of the center, while Chef Maria Wasio of Redford and caterer Georgine Petz of Grand Blanc provided the food. There also was a raffle and prizes, with a large number of the items donated by Dugger's mother, Barbara. The Club's "biggest benefactor."

The dinner attracted 144 people and raised \$7,141. With the Meijer donation, the Club was able to give out 48 gift cards and start a bank for next year's "Christmas for Seniors."

This year's party started at 3:30 p.m., but the guests of honor were all there at 3 p.m.

There was holiday music, cookies

— even sugar-free — and coffee and tea while they waited.

Dugger had her nephew Ethan McKarge distribute the gifts. Ethan earned the honor by all the work he did at the charity dinner. He worked so hard he earned the nickname of head supervisor and even a few tips.

"Ethan came to the hall to help set up and worked harder than all of us," Dugger said. "He did the setup and then came back the next day to help and worked right through the dinner."

Another volunteer earning praise is Dugger's fiancé, Robert Grinnells.

"I couldn't do it without him" Dugger said. "I couldn't and I can't."

Dugger is already talking about next year. The charity dinner has outgrown its grass-roots effort and now has a committee to handle the different aspects of it.

There'll also be new faces helping out.

One woman who was picking up a card for her mother told Dugger she would help with the garage sale next year.

"Someday I'd like to outgrow this room (at the Dorsey Center)," Dugger said. "We worked hard to get to this and I know the seniors who got the cards needed them. That's why we pass them out."

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**AROUND WESTLAND**

**Food distribution**

The city of Westland will be distributing surplus federal food 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 21, at the Dorsey Community Center, 32715 Dorsey, for residents living north of Michigan Avenue.

Residents living south of Michigan Avenue can pick up their commodities on the third Monday of the month at St. James United Methodist Church at 30055 Annapolis, between Henry Ruff and Middlebelt.

Senior citizens living in Taylor Towers pick up their food at the apartment building. Call the building manager for the date of the distribution.

For more information, call the Dorsey Center surplus food hotline at (734) 595-0366.

**New Year's Eve**

Ring in the New Year with a New Year's Eve Party at the AMVETS Post 171 Hall, 1217 Merriman, north of Palmer, Westland.

Doors will open at 6:30 p.m., with dinner served at 7 p.m. The cost is \$25 per person and includes an open bar, dinner and dancing. Tickets are available in advance at the post. Call (734) 721-9440 for more information.

**Book group**

The Science Fiction and Fantasy Discussion Group at the William P. Faust Public Library will be poring over the pages of *Variable Star* by Robert Heinlein and Spider Robinson when it meets on Wednesday, Jan. 31, in meeting room A.

For more information, call the library at (734) 326-6123.

**Council to meet**

The Westland City Council has scheduled a study session for 6 p.m. Monday, Dec. 18, to discuss an office at Hunters West apartments that provides services for mentally and physically disabled residents.

**Holiday music**

The sounds of the season will echo through Westland Shopping Center with musical performances by local groups.

The five-piece Phil Gram All Stars will perform classic holiday music 6-8 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 19, in the East Court, while 3 D's & W, a barbershop quartet, will perform throughout the mall 6-8 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 20, and Friday, Dec. 22.

With the holiday shopping season in full swing, the mall will be open a variety of hours during the month. It will be open 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. now through Wednesday, 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. Thursday and Friday, 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. Saturday and 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Christmas Eve.

The mall will be closed Christmas Day, but will reopen 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. Dec. 26. It will return to normal hours - 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. - Dec. 27-30, then open 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Dec. 31 and Jan. 1.

**Euchre games**

Friday Night Euchre/Pinochle Card Parties start at 7:30 p.m. at St. Bernardine Parish in Westland. Doors open at 7 p.m. No partner is needed. Admission is \$5 and includes refreshments, snacks and cash prizes. A 50/50 raffle also is available. The scheduled dates are Jan. 7, 5 12, 26 and Feb. 2, 9, 16. For more information, call (734) 427-5150.

**Bingo**

The Dyer Senior Center invites residents to play bingo at 1 p.m. Wednesdays at the center, 36745 Marquette, Westland. For more information, call Mary Browe at (734) 419-2020.

**Praise and worship**

Westwood Community Church holds praise and worship services at 10 a.m. Sundays at 6500 N. Wayne Road at Hunter in Westland. The church also offers a children's church and nursery. For more information, call (734) 254-0093.

**Pancake breakfast**

The Westland senior Friendship Center holds an all-you-can-eat pancake breakfast 8:30-11 a.m. the second Thursday of the month at the center on Newburgh south of Ford. The cost \$4 per person for buttermilk or multigrain pancakes, coffee, juice, lowfat milk, sausage and bacon. Sugar-free syrup will be available.



PHOTOS BY BILL BRESLER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Dr. Weldon Petz isn't just known as a Lincoln memorabilia collector. His Santa Claus figures are on display at the Plymouth Historical Museum.

**Museum display covers history of Santa Claus**

BY TONY BRUSCATO  
STAFF WRITER

While Santa Claus has been known by kids of all ages for decades as the jolly fat man with a white beard, it's a look that dates back only to the 1930s.

In fact, Santa has had countless depictions since he came on the scene in 270 A.D.

"He started as the Bishop of Myra, or St. Nicholas, to what we know now as the Coca-Cola Santa," said Weldon Petz of West Bloomfield. "Throughout the times, Santa has had many, many names and looks."

For display through the holidays, Petz has loaned the Plymouth Historical Museum approximately 300 of the 3,302 Santas he's collected the past 25 years. His collection is considered one of the largest - if not the largest - in the state of Michigan.

*Here Comes Santa Claus* will be on display through the holidays.

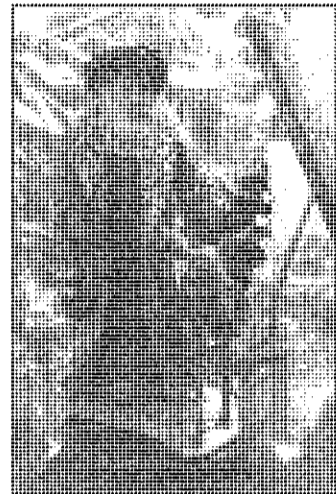
"My great-grandparents, grandparents and dad were all lovers of Christmas things, many of which I've kept," Petz said. "I even have a Santa glass ornament that was on my great-grandparents' tree from 1842."

The Santas on display at the Historical Museum represent the transformation of Santa from the beginning to the present.

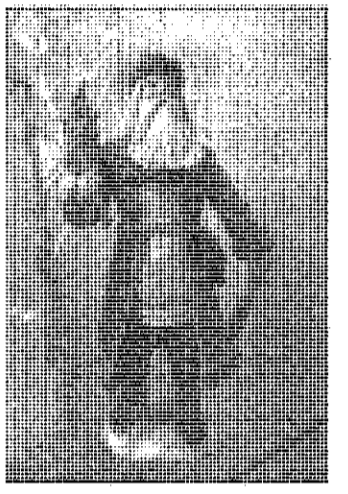
"Russia has had St. Nicholas," Petz said, "and England has had three different Santas. There's always Father Christmas."

"Black Peter is still active in Germany today," added Petz. "He would come along to the kids in medieval days and scare the kids. And, medieval Santa would come along and reward the children."

Santa has received quite a transformation since coming to America.



This Bavian Santa is one of the hundreds loaned to the museum by Dr. Weldon Petz.



Dr. Weldon Petz has a Santa collection that numbers in the thousands, including this Russian St. Nicholas figure.

"Christopher Columbus carried St. Nicholas as his patron saint," Petz said. "When Santa came to America he was known as Kris Kringle."

According to Petz, if you saw Santa on the streets during the early times in Europe, you probably wouldn't recognize him.

"He had a brown coat and a hood, and he was a black-bearded dwarf," Petz said. "In fact, Santa was a thin figure."

Santa became more of what we know today when illustrationist Thomas Nast changed the jolly man's look.

"When Thomas Nast needed to illustrate a book in color in the 1840s, he thought Santa looked drab," Petz said. "So, he invented the red coat with white trim."

Like many of us, Santa lost his thin figure and eventually turned into the jolly fat man. However, it wasn't because of eating too many cookies and milk left for him by good girls and boys on Christmas Eve.

"In the 1930s, Coca-Cola commissioned a Santa for its ads, and that's what we have today," said Petz, who calls the present version the Coca-Cola Santa.

In all, Petz's Santa collection has figurines from

around the world, and is represented by 85 Michigan artists.

"Nobody sees Santa the same way," said Petz. "Every artist has a different rendition of his face."

Petz - who sold much of his Abraham Lincoln collection to the Plymouth Historical Museum, but still has just as much at home - said there's a good reason for why he started collecting Santa Claus figures.

"He's the last of the good guys," said Petz with a chuckle.

The Petz collection made three appearances at the Plymouth Historical Museum in the 1990s, and interim director Sanford Burr is excited to have it back this year.

"I'm not a kid anymore, but I love them," said Burr as he viewed the Santas. "It just makes a spectacular display, and will be fabulous for families."

The Plymouth Historical Museum, located at 155 S. Main, is open from 1-4 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday. Admission is \$5 for adults, \$3 for children 6 years and older and \$10 for a family.

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**DEATHS**

**A**  
Wilma Jean Allmayer  
Allmayer, 78, of Farmington Hills, died Nov. 11.

**B**  
Susan M. Baker  
Baker, 60, formerly of Canton and Plymouth, died.

**Maurice L. Brown Jr.**  
Brown, 63, died Dec. 11.

**E**  
Cecilia Ellis (nee Reyes)  
Ellis, 84, died Dec. 13.

**Barbara Bowersox Frohardt**  
Frohardt, 85, formerly of Royal Oak, died Nov. 29.

**H**  
Walter V. Hawkins  
Hawkins, 78, of Saline, died Dec. 12.

**Esther L. Hibler**  
Hibler, 89, of Plymouth, died Dec. 13.

**I**  
Michael H. Ingersoll Sr.  
Ingersoll, 63, died Dec. 11.

**L**  
Robert F.C. Labadie  
Labadie, 82, of Belleville, died Dec. 12.

**P**  
Marilyn Margaret Pipp (nee Carrier)  
Pipp, 84, died Dec. 12.

**S**  
Linda Denise Slage  
Slage, 59, of Garden City, died Dec. 13.

**Margaret Steinlauf**  
Steinlauf, 74, formerly of Livonia, died Dec. 11.

Complete paid obituaries can be found inside today's newspaper in Passages on page B3.

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## It's a world of imagination, especially at Christmas time

One of the best things about being a grandparent is that it lets you be a kid again.

My 3-year-old grandson has the right idea. He hauls around a small cardboard box that



Hugh Gallagher

he's transformed into a rocket ship.

"All it takes is a little imagination," he says.

Yeah, that's right, all it takes is a little imagination. Boxes become rocket ships, kitchen chairs become a train, a puppet magically turns into a person, a bicycle becomes a super fast out-of-control motorcycle.

We are now deep into the frantic time of the Christmas season. Parents are making the annual assault on stores to find the latest hot toys for their children.

Some manufacturers seem to be deliberately keeping supplies short to enhance the buzz.

The sad thing is that many of these hot toys are imagination killers rather than enhancers. They don't stimulate play, they overwhelm play, they crush imagination. The only real play involved was the play of the games' inventors.

My grandson goes exploring with Dora the Explorer and plays other games on the computer (I expect that in about a year he'll have far surpassed my competence on the computer). But the cardboard box, the role playing, the building sets, the puppet theater all seem to engage him more completely.

The best times are when we make believe together.

"OK, you be a pirate and we've got to escape because we're being chased by tyrannosaurus rex," he says.

Next thing you know we're running at top speed to avoid being stepped on by a dinosaur.

A Dumpster looms ahead and with the raised cover it looks just like ...

"Watch out, it's the dinosaur," he yells.

I look with terror.

"No, it's OK, it's just a garbage can," he says,

just in case I've gotten too afraid to keep play-

ing. Climbing bars become a pirate's ship. A slide becomes an escape hatch. A closed door becomes a secret hideaway.

Of course, many of these adventures have been fed by books. But he embellishes greatly and casually tosses pirates in with dinosaurs and spacemen in with cowboys. It's all good.

He's not yet at the "I want this" for Christmas stage. He's just as happy with the cardboard box as he is with the remote control car or the video game. Happier.

If he's lucky, he'll keep that imagination and build upon it. Christmas won't be about the latest fad he wants, but about the special times he spends sharing his imagination with others.

Christmas is a many things to many people. It's a Christian holiday to mark the birth of Jesus. The holiday's emphasis on the infant child has placed children front and center for the holiday.

As the magi bestowed gifts upon the infant Jesus, we give gifts to our children. It's a day for children, for imagination, for play. Christmas Eve is a time of wonder, worry and giddy anticipation. We teach the children to leave a snack for Santa, reinforcing how the importance of "thank you's."

And while visions of sugarplums have been replaced by visions of Game Boy, little children still hold on to visions of Santa Claus, elves and flying reindeer.

But mostly this is a holiday about family traditions and building on rich memories. It's a reminder of all those Christmases past, especially those when we were children.

With all the stress and madness of the world, all the hustle and change, it's a good thing sometimes to let go and get down to a child's eye view.

Christmas is the perfect holiday for seeing the world with fresh eyes and an open heart. All it takes is a little imagination.

Christmas is the perfect holiday for seeing the world with fresh eyes and an open heart. All it takes is a little imagination.

Hugh Gallagher is the managing editor of the *Observer Newspapers*. He can be reached by phone at (734) 953-2149 or by e-mail at hgallagher@hometownlife.com.

## Have a Merry Christmas - whatever that means

Pity poor Christmas. It has been twisted in so many ways that it's sometimes hard for a lifelong Catholic (in spirit, if not always practice) to remember what it's all about.

What prompted this reflection is an item I saw on the National Public Radio's Web site that listed new Christmas albums. Among them was Twisted Sister's *Twisted Christmas*.



Greg Kowalski

There are only two things I know about Twisted Sister: One is that it is a heavy metal rock group and the other is that the group is led by Dee Snider, who made a truly outrageous horror film several years ago.

I am left to imagine what kind of spin Twisted Sister can give to Christmas music. I probably will never know because I don't plan to buy the album and I don't expect to receive it as a Christmas gift.

But it does bring up another facet of what has happened to Christmas as it has morphed into all kinds of things including being the subject of controversies and pointless political debates. Christmas began as a religious ceremony, of some kind or another.

It's pretty well known that Christmas and many of the trappings that we associate with it like the Christmas tree, mistletoe and holly, are derived from pagan times, when the December holiday was held to mark the winter solstice.

But even as a purely Christian event, Christmas has been subjected to all sorts of indignities over the centuries. For a long time, a Mass in church was the principal celebration of the day, although I'll bet that even a thousand years ago they were sipping mead and generally partying down, medieval-style, after they got home from church.

Once different forms of technology became available, the options to put a different spin on Christmas were quickly employed. One of the most famous, of course, is Charles

Dickens' 1843 classic *A Christmas Carol*, a product of the printing press.

This is one of the greatest, most popular books ever written. But really, what does it have to do with the true meaning of Christmas? Nothing. It's a ghost story with a theme of morality and the spirit of charity. Since then there has been a steady stream of Christmas books including one about a Grinch.

We also got our first view of Santa Claus in the 19th century when the image of the fat guy in a red suit appeared in the drawings of Thomas Nast.

Santa Claus is an elf, by the way. There were shepherds, and lambs and wise men present at the site where Jesus was born, but I don't think there were any elves.

With the advent of motion pictures about a hundred years ago, Christmas became a favorite subject and has remained so with dozens, maybe hundreds of Christmas movies, including several adaptations of *A Christmas Carol* and the one about the Grinch. Even John Wayne got into the act as the most mind-boggling Roman soldier of all times in *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. Maybe the best Christmas movie ever made is *A Christmas Story*, Jean Shepherd's charming and nostalgic tale of a boy and his BB gun.

There were no BB guns in ancient Bethlehem.

You can take what you want from the story of Christmas, or you don't have to take anything at all. But when you look at all the ways Christmas has been transformed into so many different things it's amazing that it has any kind of coherent meaning.

Yet one thing is certain: Christmas generates an aura of good spirits for those who believe in it as either a religious or secular celebration. Whether you say Happy Holidays or Merry Christmas - enjoy.

Greg Kowalski is editor of the *Birmingham Eccentric*. He can be reached at (248) 901-2570 or by e-mail at gkowsk@hometownlife.com.



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# Patterson, Ficano tout efforts to diversify region's economy

BY ALEX LUNDBERG  
STAFF WRITER

The county executives from both sides of Eight Mile Road made the same claim Thursday morning: They are committed to doing whatever it takes to bring the jobs of the future to southeast Michigan.

Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson and Wayne County Executive Bob Ficano addressed editors, reporters and newspaper executives at the annual *Observer & Eccentric* Journalist of the Year breakfast at the Townsend Hotel in Birmingham.

And unlike their recent joint television appearance, the two spent most of the hour talking cordially on the issues that bind the two counties.

Ficano said there's been a lot of talk about economic problems in Michigan. He said the glass doesn't have to be half-empty — but people always talk like that.

"Many times the rest of the world envies what we have and don't use," he said. "Every gen-

eration faces crises and southeast Michigan has always stepped up to them. You should have heard my grandparents talk about the Depression."

He said the region's biggest asset was Detroit Metro Airport. Just as Detroit was built on the shores of an important waterway, the future of the region is dependent on air traffic, according to Ficano.

"The global economy can't be ignored, if we're going to compete our big assets are going to be Metro and Willow Run," he said. "I-94 from Ann Arbor to Detroit is the new gold coast. That's why Pfizer and Toyota have their R&D operations there — the proximity to U-of-M and other colleges."

Patterson touted Oakland County as the "engine that drives the Michigan economy" and said programs like Automation Alley and his own Emerging Sectors are proof the region is ready to contend on all fronts that matter.

"In 2003 we decided to look

into the future and find out what industries were coming to replace manufacturing," he said. "It's biotech, it's nanotechnology. We're gradually beginning to diversify our economic base. By the time we get all of those industries, it will have been a 20-year rollout."

While both executives agreed new technology and new industry were the keys to the future, they diverged on the topic of Detroit's Cobo Center. Ficano has announced a plan to renovate and expand the convention center, a plan Patterson has denounced as too expensive for his constituents.

"I disagree with how it's being funded, I'll always disagree with it," Patterson said. "There's \$120 million in deferred maintenance on the building and we're going to pay Detroit \$20 million? They

should be paying us to get them off the hook."

Ficano said Cobo is the home of the North American International Auto Show and, therefore, the home of the region's number one brand. Given that the average NALAS has more credentialed media than a Super Bowl, he said, the region has to step up to keep the show viable with a new center.

The price, according to Ficano, a continuation of a hotel/liquor tax, isn't so onerous.

"The tax isn't on property owners, it's on poured drinks," Ficano said.

"If it goes away, bars are not going to lower the price of those drinks."

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Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano (left) and Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson (right) at a breakfast event, among other topics, the future of Detroit's Cobo Hall, while *Observer* Managing Editor Hugh Gallagher (center) moderated.

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