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Housing employee charged with embezzlement



Cramier-Oncza

BY DARRELL CLEM
STAFF WRITER

A woman who oversaw a family assistance program for the city of Westland has been charged with embezzling money intended for a client.

Tonya Cramier-Oncza, 39, faces a hearing today in Westland District Court following allegations she cashed a check and kept some of the money, authorities said. A not-guilty plea has been placed on

record for her as she faces a hearing today on charges of uttering and publishing the check and embezzling \$1,000 or more. She is free on a \$5,000 personal bond.

Cramier-Oncza was employed by an outside agency to oversee the federal Family Self-Sufficiency Program, which provides assistance for cars, schooling and necessities to help clients become independent. Cramier-Oncza has been terminated

from the Westland-based program, housed at the Dorsey Community Center in the city's Norwayne neighborhood.

She is accused of forging a woman's name on a check and keeping some of the money. The charges surfaced after the client came forward with allegations that she had been defrauded by Cramier-Oncza, according to Westland police Sgt. Michael Harhold.

City officials have since learned that the defendant also had a prior fraud-related

conviction, and she has been charged as a second-degree habitual offender.

Terry Carroll, interim Westland housing and community development director, said the city has since investigated every check that Cramier-Oncza handled and has talked with her former clients.

"We are certain that this is the only time that there was an inconsistency," he said.

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Students find space in new gym

For more photos of Tuesday's dedication ceremony, visit our Westland Photo Gallery online at www.hometownlife.com.

BY SUE MASON
STAFF WRITER

As Sara Clevenger, Jordan Berry and Ashley Omev see it, a second gymnasium at Wayne Memorial High School means someplace other than a hallway to work on their routines.

"We have a place to practice," said an excited Berry, who joined her fellow members of the varsity cheer squad in performing during the dedication of the Alumni Arena addition Tuesday afternoon.

"Now we have a place to do our cheers, before we had to think about our spacing," added Clevenger.

Sitting on a bench in one of two new locker rooms, the three teens checked out the new digs, admiring the lockers — "They're humongous," Omev said — and the new fitness room.

Students like Clevenger, Berry and Omev, played a major role in the dedication, from the presentation of the colors by the school's JROTC color guard to the singing of the national anthem by the Vocal Dimensions and the playing of the fight song by the marching band.

There was even a student representative, Olivia LaFortune, who told school officials and guests that attending Wayne Memorial has "given me the opportunities to secure a positive



TOM HAWLEY | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Wayne Memorial Principal John Albrecht (from left) Wayne-Westland school board President Fred Weaver, Superintendent Greg Baracy and Wayne Mayor Al Haidous had the honors of cutting the ribbon to officially open the new addition to Wayne Memorial High School's Alumni Arena Tuesday afternoon.

future."

"I have spent eight, nine, 10 hours a day here, this has become my second home, part of my extended family," she said. "On behalf of the students, I want to thank the school board and the community for their vision." LaFortune also made histo-

ry with her teammates as the girls volleyball became the first school team to use the court. They presented a brief demonstration as part of the dedication.

"We won't play there because there's not enough bleachers and they come too close to the court," she said

later. "But we start practicing in there this week."

The man of the hour, however, was Supt. Greg Baracy who was lauded for his "vision" by school board President Frederick Weaver.

"This just didn't happen, it

PLEASE SEE GYM, A4

City decides civic center is best spot for summer festival

BY DARRELL CLEM
STAFF WRITER

Westland's summer festival will likely remain in the city's civic center complex this year even if Central City Park is still fenced off due to contamination, officials decided Tuesday.

"I think we can make it work," Mayor William Wild said Monday evening, during talks with festival organizers and Westland City Council members.

Most festival activities occur near Westland City Hall and the Bailey Recreation Center, although the crowd often spills into the park. This year, officials decided to keep people off the partially contaminated site.

City officials plan to ask Wayne County officials and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality for permission to use fenced-off park land for the popular fireworks show, although the crowd would be kept outside the fence.

The only other access to the park may be an east-end parking area, where festival vendors could park their vehicles.

Some festival organizers indicated they have the jitters about the 37th festival, due to

widespread publicity about elevated levels of lead in Central City Park.

Wild ordered the 100-acre park fenced off in early January until the DEQ can conduct more thorough testing for lead and other contaminants, including possible 55-gallon drums.

Festival Chairman Kenneth Mehl said Monday that, due to uncertainty about where the festival would occur, organizers are far behind in booking vendors and entertainers.

"All these things are a problem," he said. "It's troublesome."

Mehl and some other festival leaders also implored elected leaders to actively promote the festival, saying city officials in past years seemed more intent on promoting another event, the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life.

"Why isn't there an effort put into the festival like there is Relay for Life?" Mehl asked.

Elected leaders responded that they support the festival by hosting it on city property and by approving such events as the fireworks show.

Early in Monday's talks,

PLEASE SEE FESTIVAL, A4

Group wants new Maida Woods study

BY DARRELL CLEM
STAFF WRITER

A showdown is looming this month between developers and residents fiercely at odds over a proposed subdivision on Westland's southwest side.

Royal Oak-based developers Kentmoor LLC this week submitted to city officials a site plan for 35 single-lot homes — scaled back from 41 — on the south side of Palmer between John Hix and Hannan.

D.W. Krane, one of the developers, said the revision protects 2.5 acres of state-regulated wetlands except for "a sliver" of land

needed for a road. He said that portion would be offset by creating a small wetland elsewhere on the site.

But a citizens group's lawyer, Michael Grant, had earlier filed a still-pending petition with the state alleging that environmental officials didn't properly assess the wetlands area. The group — called the Westland Homeowners Committee for Environmental Conservation and Smart Growth — is demanding a new study before the Westland City Council votes on the project.

"They're trying to ramrod this through,"

the group's treasurer, Dennis Sparks, said of developers.

Council President Charles Pickering has scheduled a study session for 6 p.m. Monday, Feb. 12, at City Hall to resume talks about the Maida Woods project. He said opponents and developers will have ample opportunity to address elected officials.

Officials could decide the issue as early as Tuesday, Feb. 20, during a council business meeting.

PLEASE SEE MAIDA WOODS, A3



The controversial Maida Woods project would be built in the left area shown in this picture. Critics say it would disrupt the natural land and displace wildlife.

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AROUND WESTLAND

Swearing in

The public is invited to a swearing in ceremony for new Westland 18th District Judge Sandra Cicirelli at 6 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 15, at the city of Westland's senior citizen Friendship Center, 1119 N. Newburgh. A reception also is scheduled. Judges are encouraged to bring robes.

Bingo

The Ladies Auxiliary of Harris Kehr VFW Post 3323 will hold a marathon bingo noon-5 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 3, at the post, 1055 N. Wayne Road, Westland. Money raised will go towards the post's general fund projects for veterans.

A second marathon bingo will be held noon-5 p.m. Saturday, March 10, to support the Youth Activities Adopt A Troop project for overseas veterans.

Presidents Day Dinner

The Garden City and Westland Democratic Clubs will present a Presidents Day Dinner Monday, Feb. 19, at the Harris Kehr VFW Post 3323, 1055 S. Wayne Road, Westland.

Dinner will be at 6 p.m., followed by a Historical Presentation by America's First Ladies. Tickets cost \$10 each and are available by calling Carol Larkin at (734) 837-8724 or

(734) 674-7327 or by sending name, address and telephone number and a check payable to the Garden City Democratic Club and Westland Democratic Club 1021 W. Rose, Garden City, MI 481835. The deadline for ordering tickets is Feb. 12.

Churches meet

Churches United Against Hunger will meet at noon Tuesday, Feb. 23 at the Lighthouse Home Mission on Plamer west of Venoy.

CUAH is a coalition of 20 Westland churches whose aim is to provide for the needy in the Westland community. For more information, call (734) 326-3885.

Vegas Night

St. Theodore Parish will hold a Vegas Night 6 p.m. to midnight Friday, Feb. 2, and Saturday, Feb. 3, at the church, 8200 N. Wayne Road, Westland.

There will be 50/50 drawings every hour and games like Black Jack, Let It Ride, Easy Craps, roulette, money wheel and Texas Hold'em. The maximum win will be \$500 per person. Food, Beer, wine and soft drinks will be available. Admission is \$2. For more information, call (734) 425-4421, voicemail 10.

Z-PAC dinner

The Wayne Memorial High School Zebra Parents Advisory

Council will hold a Valentine Dinner and Silent Auction on Friday, Feb. 9, at the William D. Ford Career Technical Center, 36455 Marquette, Westland. Doors will open at 6:30 p.m. with the sit-down dinner served at 7 p.m.

The dinner will be prepared by Chef Tony Paquette, head of the center's culinary arts program and include a homemade chocolate mousse. There also will be a silent auction featuring a variety of Zebra collectibles.

Because seating is limited, only 125 tickets will be sold. They're priced at \$40 per person or \$75 per couple. Tickets as well as information about sponsorships are available by calling Wayne High Principal John Albrecht at (734) 419-2200.

Black History Month

The William P. Faust Public Library of Westland will honor Black History Month with a presentation by versatile storyteller Rosie Chapman. In the oral storytelling tradition, Miz Rosie will recreate the courage of Harriet Tubman as she helped people to freedom on the Underground Railroad.

The special family event will be 1 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 3. Free tickets now are available at the Children's desk. For information, call the library at (734) -326-6123.

wetlands assessment be declared invalid - a move that could stall or block the project.

His petition contends that the earlier study "fails to identify the extent of regulated wetlands" on the property and that the project would leave the wetlands area "polluted, impaired or destroyed as a result of unregulated dredging, filling and other activities..."

Krane, however, said developers accept the earlier wetlands assessment, and they want a state administrative judge to reject Grant's petition.

"We are following all of Westland's ordinances," Krane said. "We are following all of

the state of Michigan's requirements for the development of this property."

Developers will need a state wetlands permit along with city approval before the project could proceed. Critics said the process should stop until the state reviews its wetlands assessment.

"This is a waste of city resources and taxpayer money," said Leona Duffy, senior vice president for the citizens group.

Project critic Jim Rubasky agreed, saying "there's no final DEQ documents."

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Group questions Whitehead's residency

BY DAVE VARGA
STAFF WRITER



Whitehead

thing will be done," he said. On Tuesday, Whitehead said he does spend time with a female friend in another community, along with traveling a lot out of state for work.

However, he called the Arden Street house his "primary residence."

"I'm looking into it. As far as I knew, I'm still legally a resident at the house. I still get bills there. I still stay there... it's my part of this community."

In response to the challenge, Livonia City Clerk Val Vandersloot said her office sent a certified letter to Whitehead's house. It gives him 30 days to prove that he is still a qualified voter, which requires showing a utility bill at the address. A challenged elector would also be required to take an oath before the clerk.

Neighbors of the Arden Street house, where there's a for-sale sign, said Whitehead does go there, but he doesn't live there.

Whitehead said he will make a decision about his future this week. Personally, his focus is his two daughters. As a board member, he said, his aim has always been "student learning and continuous improvement" and he doesn't want this situation to "deflect from that."

"I want to do the right thing for the board," Whitehead said.

Several CFLF members told the board that the timing is important - if a vacancy occurs more than 90 days before the election, the seat could go before the voters in the upcoming

In response to the challenge, Livonia City Clerk Val Vandersloot said her office sent a certified letter to Whitehead's house. It gives him 30 days to prove that he is still a qualified voter, which requires showing a utility bill at the address.

ing May 8 election, where two trustee seats are already on the ballot. That 90-day deadline would be early next week, officials said. The filing deadline for the school board election is Feb. 13.

Wolkan noted that if trustees allowed time to transpire past the 90-day limit, trustees could appoint a replacement - meaning it'd be a year until the public could elect that board member. He referred to what he called the board's "track record of deceit and evasiveness."

Scheel said later that the board would follow the law, if there is a resignation. She also noted that fellow board members don't have the authority to ask another member to step down. In addition, Scheel said a board member "can be a resident and still decide to resign."

Trustee Cynthia Markarian said she was appalled at the CFLF questions and the fact that board members didn't have a chance to discuss the issue.

"As in typical CFLF form, they brought these (questions) to the podium and made it seem like there's a conspiracy going on here. I seriously do not approve of it and I've had enough."

MAIDA WOODS

FROM PAGE A1

Project critics have said Maida Woods could destroy a refuge for wildlife, encroach on a wetlands area, adversely affect the Rouge River and negatively impact their properties. They say they're not against development, but believe it should be done properly.

Grant, their attorney, has filed a four-page petition with the Office of Administrative Hearings for the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality.

He has asked that the earlier

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WYAA: Kids will play ball this season

BY DARRELL CLEM
STAFF WRITER

Batter up.
Despite the closing of Central City Park and its ball diamonds due to contamination, youth baseball and softball still will be played this summer in Westland. Officials representing the Westland Youth Athletic Association moved Monday to quell rumors to the contrary. "We want to get the word out that baseball is alive and well in Westland," said Keith DeMolay, WYAA operations vice president. Youngsters won't be playing on Central City Park's two ball diamonds, where soil testing has shown elevated levels of lead. However, DeMolay and WYAA President Jack Profitt said Monday that baseball and softball will likely be

played on fields in Voss, Rotary and Jaycee parks — and on diamonds at Marshall Middle School. "We do have fields we can use — they're just not as good as the ones at Central City Park," Profitt said. Other than the alternate sites mentioned, WYAA leaders held out hope that city and county officials also will find additional places where children can play. On occasion, WYAA youngsters have used ball diamonds in Hines Park, but DeMolay said those fields often can't be used due to flooding. In all, 400-500 children ages 5 to 18 typically participate in 15 WYAA leagues — two of which were based at Central City Park. WYAA has hosted state tournaments as recently as last summer in the park, drawing youngsters from

across the state. After the situation became public last November, some parents lashed out at officials for potentially placing children at risk by allowing them to play on contaminated baseball fields. Children who have since been tested for exposure to lead have been shown to have levels that health officials don't consider harmful. Still, some parents have said they should have been allowed to make their own decisions about whether their children should play in the park. Profitt, meanwhile, said WYAA games will continue elsewhere this year. He said the athletic group has survived since 1958, although its name changed after Westland was carved out of the old Nankin Township in 1966.

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PHOTOS BY TOM HAWLEY | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Seniors Ashley Parker (from left), Jasmen Sheffield-Sadler and Ebony Riley get into the spirit of the Wayne Memorial Zebra fight song.



The Wayne Memorial High School Marching Band entertained guests in the corridor linking the new and old portions of the Alumni Arena in advance of the dedication ceremony.



Junior Chelsea Johnson works out on one of the new elliptical crosstrainers during general physical education class.

FESTIVAL

FROM PAGE A1
some officials acknowledged that other festival sites had been pondered, such as the city's golf course near Merriman and Cherry Hill or the old Clyde Smith & Sons property near Newburgh and Joy. Ultimately, some leaders indicated that moving the festival could send the wrong message on a contamination issue that some officials and residents already view as overblown by the media. The controversy erupted in November after it became known that city administra-

tion officials, the county and the DEQ had known about the contamination for years but didn't publicly reveal it. Wayne County has since tested 132 people for possible exposure to lead. Other than an initial false scare for one child, no one showed levels considered dangerous. On Monday, resident Bud Somerville, who used to be an umpire for games on the contaminated baseball diamonds, offered to sleep in the park for six months if officials find a way to keep him warm during cold months. "There's nothing wrong out there — it's a joke," he said. Meanwhile, it was

Councilman James Godbout who clearly spelled out the compromise of keeping the festival in its usual location and talking with county and DEQ officials about possibly using the park for the fireworks show. Councilwoman Cheryl Graunstadt agreed that if the plan appears workable, "I think it's the best place for it." Despite possible alternate sites, council President Charles Pickering said, "I don't know how you can logistically go anywhere else." Festival organizers have proposed having the event June 28 through July 4.

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GYM

FROM PAGE A1

took the vision of a man who has a heart for this community," Weaver said. "Thank you, Dr. Baracy, for your drive and dedication to get us to this place." Baracy, however, credited the community for its support of the district's sinking fund millage four years ago and for its commitment to education. "This compliments our core rigorous curriculum which enables our students to compete in a global economy," Baracy said. "This is an investment in our students' future. Each and every one of you should be proud.

"To our students, this is second to none, the envy of your peers and the symbol of Wayne Pride." "It's come a long way from my Wayne High days," said alumnus William Snodgrass who was at the ceremony with his wife, Mary Ann, a graduate of Wayne Memorial High School. "We had a very small facility, it was about half this size." Sharon Scott, another Wayne Memorial grad and a former school board member, used the word beautiful in describing her reaction to the addition. "I really like it a lot," she said. In addition to a second gymnasium, the facility includes a fitness room that

can accommodate 40 students on a variety of stairsteppers, upright and recumbent bicycles, elliptical crosstrainers and weight lifting equipment. "I've already had students ask if they be can use the equipment in the evening," said Baracy following the ceremony. "They want to use it, that's the first step." Clevenger is one who agrees. "When you're try to lose a few pounds, it's great to have," she said. The school began officially using the gym Wednesday morning, although a sixth-hour physical education class slipped in after the ceremony, and the cheerleaders were back for a 6 p.m. practice.

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Investors need to review changes to deferral programs

At the end of the month, DaimlerChrysler will be making some adjustments to its 401(k) plan. It is eliminating some investment options and adding some new ones. This is a trend that is common, but does require action on behalf of an investor.

Many companies have become proactive with their salary deferral programs. Either they are making massive changes to their programs or they are making minor adjustments. Either way, when your employer changes your salary deferral plan, it is important for investors to review the changes and then take appropriate action. In many cases, such as in the DaimlerChrysler situation, they are replacing an underperforming fund with a much better fund. In the DaimlerChrysler situation, the transfer will be done automatically; however, this is not always the case with other companies. Therefore, when there is a change in investment options, you should review the options and select the ones that best suit your individual situation.

I cannot stress how important it is for you and me to take advantage of salary deferral programs. Whether they are 401(k), 403(b), Simple or SEP Plans, they are great ways to save for one's retirement and, therefore, we should take advantage of them. However, it is important to realize that not all salary deferral programs are the same. Unfortunately, many employ-



Money Matters

Rick Bloom

ers do not spend enough time with their salary deferral program and thus they end up with plans that have high costs to their employees and underperforming investment options. There are many companies that offer very good salary deferral programs that have not only low costs to the employer, but also low costs to the employee and solid investment options. Companies like Vanguard and T. Rowe Price are just a couple of the companies that offer these types of plans. High costs and poor investment options benefit neither the employee nor the employer. Having an efficient and cost-effective salary deferral program is a win-win for both the employee and the employer.

If you are an employer, whether with a large or small company, I encourage you to take some time and review your salary deferral program. Look at the investment options and see how they have performed over time. In addition, look at all the fees that are being charged; not only the ones that you are writing a check for, but also the fees that are coming out of the employees' accounts. I recognize that sometimes it is difficult to evaluate salary

deferral programs, however, I guarantee you that the time you spend analyzing your plan is well worth it. The money you can save is substantial and the employer-employee loyalty that you will gain is immeasurable. One hint — if your retirement plan is through an insurance company, you almost always will have high fees.

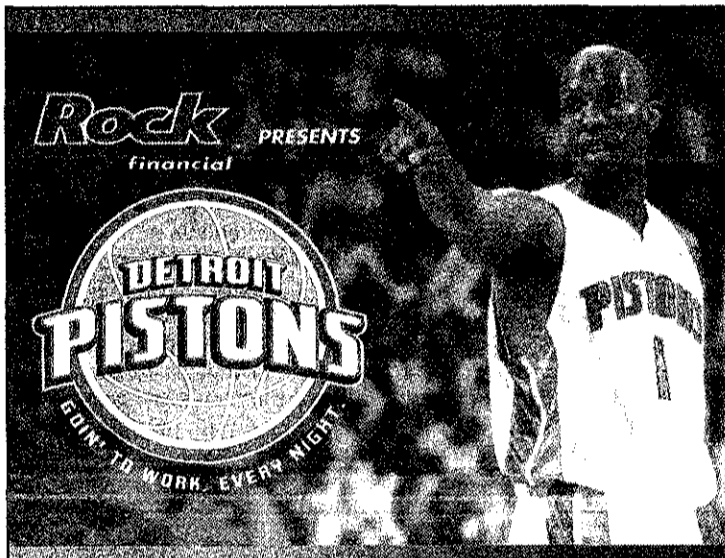
Not only should employers be proactive with their salary

deferral program, but also employees. If you are a participant in a salary deferral program, you owe it to yourself to review the investment options and all the costs of the plan, particularly if you are in a small business where you can discuss these issues directly with the owner. By being proactive, not only can you save thousands of dollars in fees, but it also can save the employer money.

Saving for retirement is important to everyone. As I have stated many times, retirement is a brand new concept in the history of mankind and is something that every one of us needs to be concerned with. After all, many of us will live longer in retirement than the time we spent working. Therefore, taking advantage of a salary deferral program is essential. However, what

makes it even better is to participate in a plan that is low-cost and has good investment options. Good luck!

Rick Bloom is a fee-only financial adviser. *Observer & Eccentric* readers can submit questions at money@hometownlife.com. For more information, visit his Web site at www.bloomassetmanagement.com. You can hear Rick from noon to 3 p.m. Sundays on WDTK-AM (1400).



TOMORROW - 2/2 VS. MILWAUKEE BUCKS • 8:00 PM

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LINDSEY HUNTER MINI-BOBBLEHEAD TO FIRST 10,000 FANS
COURTESY OF CHEVY THE MOTOR CITY

TUESDAY - 2/6 VS. BOSTON CELTICS • 7:30 PM

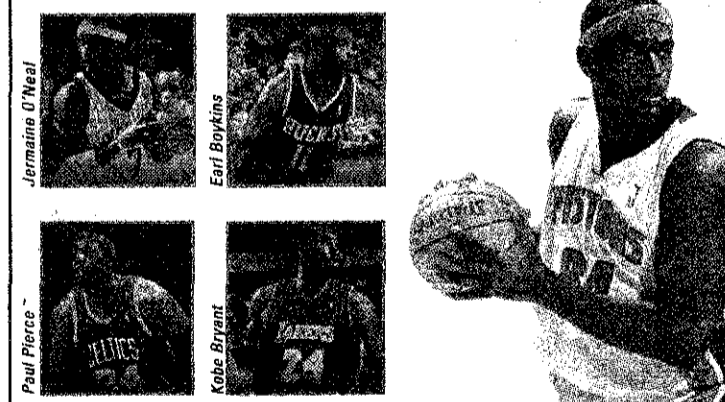
CHAUNCEY BILLUPS GROWTH CHART TO FIRST 6,000 FANS
- 14 AND UNDER COURTESY OF Walgreens

THURSDAY - 2/8 VS. LOS ANGELES LAKERS • 8:00 PM

CHRIS WEBBER POSTER TO FIRST 10,000 FANS
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SATURDAY - 2/10 VS. TORONTO RAPTORS • 7:30 PM

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(Model T Plaza)
313-869-7392

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(southwest corner of Orchard Lake Rd. & 14 Mile Rd.)
248-538-9900

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17245 Silver Pkwy
(in the Sears Plaza)
810-629-2733

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586-777-4010

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248-393-6800

MONROE
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734-241-4099

NORTHVILLE
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734-779-0148

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248-305-6600

Twelve Oaks Mall
(lower level play area)

PONTIAC/WATERFORD
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248-335-9900

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248-853-0550

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31921 Woodward Ave.
(at Normandy)
248-549-4177

ST. CLAIR SHORES
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SOUTHFIELD
28117 Telegraph Rd.
(south of 12 Mile Rd.)
248-358-3700

STERLING HEIGHTS
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(M-59 & M-53, Utica Park Plaza)
586-997-6500

Lakeside Mall
(lower level, Sears Ct.)

TAYLOR
23495 Eureka Rd.
(across from Southland Mall)
734-287-1770

Southland Mall
23000 Eureka Rd.
(in the JC Penney wing)

TROY
1913 E. Big Beaver Rd.
(Troy Sports Center)
248-526-0040

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OAK PARK
Cellular Cellutions
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Ann Arbor Wireless
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734-374-4472

TROY
The Wireless Shop
248-458-1111

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Mobile2Mobile Wireless
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OUR VIEWS

Make a difference, become a mentor

Business is booming, so to speak, for the Westland Youth Assistance Program. Last year, it received a record 315 referrals, and already has 25 referrals just three weeks into the new year.

It's a double-edged sword for the program. An increased number of referrals shows people recognize a need for the services it provides troubled youth. It also highlights the program's need for more mentors like Toni Durham, who was named the program's Mentor of the Year for 2006 at the annual Youth Assistance dinner last week.

A mentor is an adult who provides young people ages 9-16 with support, counsel, friendship, reinforcement and constructive example. Mentors are good listeners, people who care, people who want to help young people bring out strengths that are already there.

The rewards are many for the small commitment of time. After 15 hours of training, mentors are asked to spend one or two hours a week with the youth, talking about issues and helping with decisions.

Things that may seem easy or straightforward to an adult are often mysterious to young people, and helping them sort it out can come during a trip to the ice cream store, a walk around the mall, or while at a local sporting event.

With the devastating effect today's economy is having on families, there's a need for support networks for youth like that provided by Youth Assistance, support that helped turn around Christina Roberts and Charles Canfield, who are the program's male and female Youths of the Year for 2006.

And we don't want to forget the Westland Police Department, which was selected as the Agency of the Year, and longtime life-choices class facilitator Hugh Bowman, who received a special award at the dinner.

We encourage residents to consider becoming mentors and give program director Paul Motz a call at (734) 467-7904. You need to be at least age 21, have no felony criminal record and have a driver's license as well as take the training.

Your commitment can help turn today's troubled teen into tomorrow's responsible adult.

Things that may seem easy or straightforward to an adult are often mysterious to young people ...

Public education needs new model

Local public school officials are holding their breath in anticipation of major cuts to the per-pupil funding formula.

The latest round of school funding roulette is a clear example that the current system of financing our K-12 public schools is broken, and in desperate need of repair. Expecting local districts to absorb a reduction in funding halfway through the school year after expenses have already been fixed borders on the absurd. Yet, with Lansing now doling out the education dollars, it has become an all-too-familiar scenario.

The notion that our public schools are locally controlled is now more myth than reality. Proposal A took care of that a decade ago, when financing public education was transferred from local district residents via property tax, to the state with an enhanced sales tax and statewide property tax.

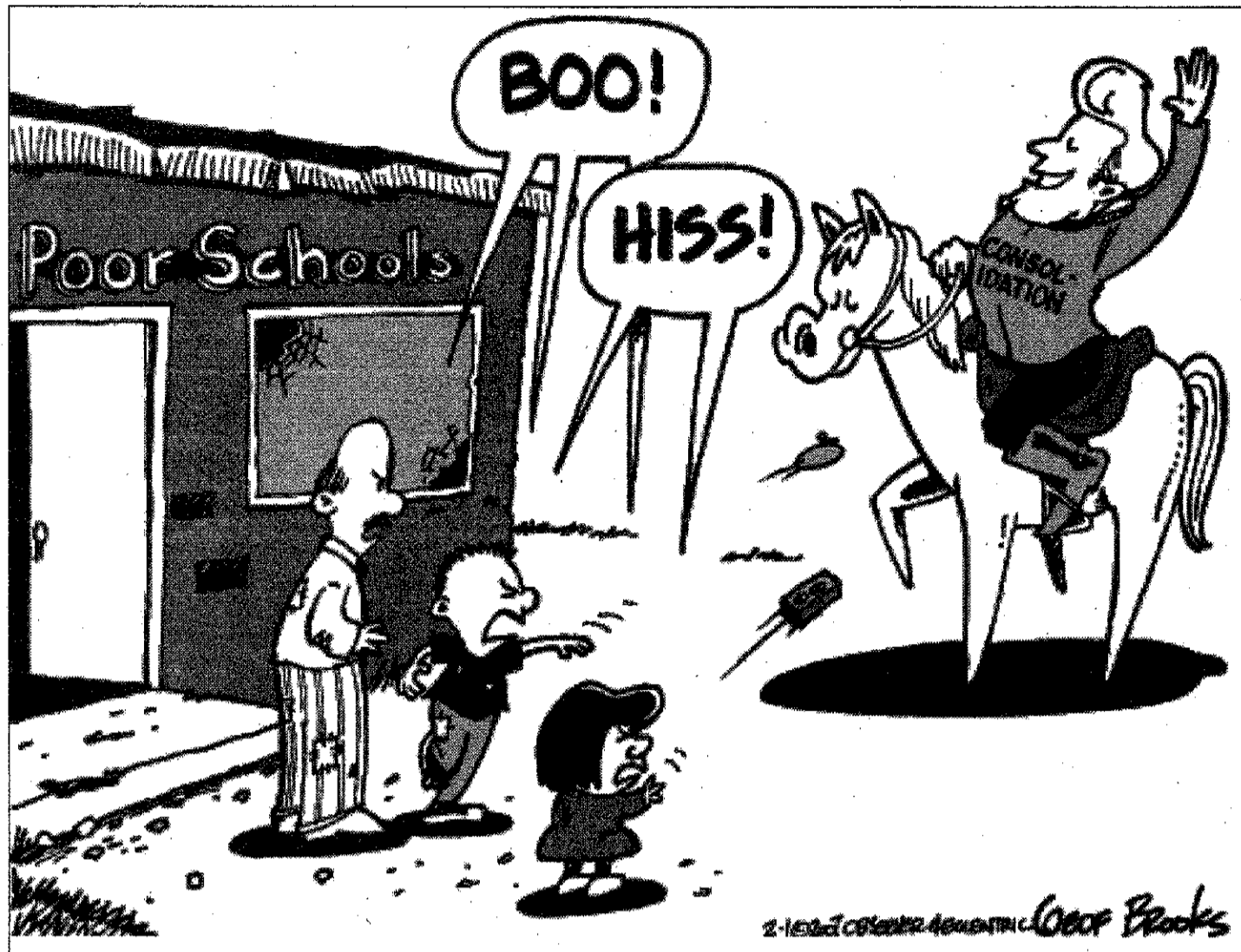
Our public education model no longer fits the funding formula. Just one glaring example is the fact that school calendars — and therefore budgets — run on a July to June calendar, while the state budget follows a calendar year. That's why mid-year cuts are becoming the norm, when the state began bleeding a sea of red ink with no way to fund the per-pupil promise.

Locally controlled school districts funded with locally allocated taxes is a model that has gone the way of the passenger pigeon.

Since the state Legislature and governor's office have taken over financing the public education system, the next logical step would be to take more control over how education is delivered in the state.

Bold action is needed in Lansing to save our schools. Smaller districts must be absorbed into larger ones; sharing services and satellite classrooms must become the norm rather than the exception; group purchasing and coordinated transportation needs to be mandatory.

It is unlikely the Legislature will scrap Proposal A and once again allow residents to determine the funding levels for their "own" local district. The time has come to blow up the outdated model, and develop a new one that fits everyone's needs.



Our democratic process

First of all, congratulations to the new mayor, Mr. Bill Wild, and to the two new Westland City Council members. Mr. Dewey Reeves and Mr. Bill Johnson.

The Jan. 3, 2007, city council meeting was indeed democracy in action. Because of the vast interest in running for a city council seat, the field of candidates was outstanding, proving that many citizens do participate in our city government. And for that, we, too, join the many citizens in thanking those candidates who chose to run for the two seats.

But of course, all of us know that there will only be two chosen from the large field of candidates. And, as our process dictates, voting takes place on each randomly selected candidate.

Since, after exhausting many of the nominees without selecting any, Councilwoman (Cheryl) Graunstadt proceeded to put all of the un-nominated names into the process by nominating them. Another great decision! Anyone who is politically savvy realized that in no way could she support all of the candidates, but she wanted to give each one the same chance of being selected.

It is perfectly understandable that those who did not make it would be disappointed, however, anyone who left angry or critical of the process or of those who were elected, possibly did not deserve to win anyway. In grade school, we called these "sore losers."

So, when the accusations came at the end of the meeting against council members who did the right thing and against the newly elected members, in our opinion, the criticism was unwarranted.

Regarding the charge of nepotism, recall when just a few short years ago, the wife of a sitting council member ran for the city clerk's position. At that time, we don't recall anyone on the council questioning that ballot. What was this an issue at this time, when it related to siblings rather than to spouses who in our estimation would be considered a closer relationship?

No, it is not about power, control, political favors, deals, nepotism, it was about a democratic process that serves us well. Again, we congratulate all the candidates and especially the ones who were elected. Welcome to the world of politics. We wish you well.

James and Mary Murphy
Westland

A poor loser

As a woman of 91 years, I am a dedicated watcher of Westland City Council meetings. I feel I have the right and the duty to state my opinion on the remarks made by Jim Godbout, accusing Cheryl Graunstadt of wheeling and dealing with Chuck Pickering to make certain nominations. Cheryl and Chuck are two of the most honest people that we know and they would not do this.

Shame on you, Jim! You are a poor loser. Above all things, when you lost the state election, you decided to nominate yourself for the position on the city council. Low and behold, no one voted for you, so you voted for yourself. Someone has to win and someone has to lose, fact of life. You should know by now the voters vote for those they think are worthy.

I hope all the citizens of Westland will watch closely over the all the meetings. In fact, I pray God will watch over us in our great city.

On an added note, I wish to thank God

LETTERS

for my family, friends, St. Richard's, the Friendship Center, Dorsey Center and everyone I have been involved with for the good they have put into my life.

I have very great memories and will continue to pray for all those that have entered my life. Due to health problems, I am unable to communicate as I would like to.

The city council meeting regarding this letter was Tuesday, Jan. 16, 2007. I would like to congratulate all the winners.

Love and God bless,

Betty Savage
Westland

In keeping with dictionary

We are barely into the sixth year of the Bush administration and Mr. Bush is struggling with the English language. The latest, the surge in troops for another buildup in Iraq. Not an escalation, but a surge.

If he used the dictionary to find escalate, he would find it is defined as to increase in extent, volume, number, amount, intensity or scope, reference war and troop levels, perfectly describes the increase in troops he is proposing.

By contrast, the same dictionary has a surge to rise and fall actively, to rise suddenly to an excessive or abnormal value, with no reference to war, but to the stock market and ships. (So much for his own experience with No Child Left Behind principles, perhaps he was.)

This would normally be funny to have a powerful man being handicapped, but these times, lives are being lost in Iraq. It has confounded most Americans since he has taken office, but Mr. Bush has proven quite well that he cannot be trusted to be honest and straightforward with Americans.

Time and time again, he has stated information that has knowingly been incorrect or misrepresented the facts. He has lost credibility because of this. The only thing Americans can say for certain when Mr. Bush speaks is that what he presents is certainly not true.

There are a few words that correctly describe him, though. Mr. Bush could be said to exalt this nation above the individual and stand for a centralized autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader, severe economic and social regimentation and forcible suppression of opposition.

He has complained that America is not involved with the everyday war and that only soldiers and their families are personally involved. He has not listened to experts or the American people. This administration has pushed a huge, HUGE debt on the majority of America, while trimming the burden shared by wealthy Americans.

And as much as he has tried to portray himself as an average American, he is anything but average. Much like his father who knew nothing of a bar code scanner at the grocery store, he knows nothing of ordinary life in America and his decisions governing this country demonstrates this quite well.

And his insistence on spying on everyday Americans without oversight or court review despite the ease to do so surely indicates he is spying on his political foes.

All of these traits describe a fascist. It is one word without a doubt that reflects Mr. Bush's governance of this nation.

Frances Meese
Westland

Tired of same old thing

I just read your opinions column in the paper today (as been my habit lately), and let me just say, I'm really tired of reading the same old stuff week after week.

Don't get me wrong, what happened in the park and the way City Council is airing their problems publicly, is really appalling, but I get TIRED of reading it. Why don't people comment on other problems, like why does the first gentleman, or whatever he's called these days, have a staff of at least three people, all of whom are paid for by the state, when he's not even a state employee.

His chief of staff gets paid \$80,000 a year for that gravy job. What does she do? Tell him when there's another dinner party to go to. Heck, that's my wife's job, as it should be his wife's job, too.

Or how about how the governor is failing miserably at her job and is running out of people to blame for your lot in life, so she has just appointed a bunch of stooges to advise her to raise our taxes or to tax everything not already being taxed, so she can sit back and say, "They made me do it, I didn't want to, but they said I had to."

Anyway, all I'm saying is that there's more to write about than who sat by who at the council meeting or what should be done to the park. Come on people and let your voice be heard by the people who REALLY should be hearing it.

Don Pechin
Westland

Good to see working together

At the board committee meeting on Jan. 8, I read a list of things we can be proud of in the district. I stated that LPS offers special education programs up to age 26. I was offered constructive criticism as to the fact that federal law requires eligible students from birth to age 21 and state law states birth to age 26. That's correct, and I apologize if, as a part of my list of highlights, I placed this as unique only to Livonia, though Livonia offered special education way before it was mandated.

We can all be proud of the Career Center opportunities, business partnerships, clean schools, and great PTA programs. I am pleased to see us working together in regards to anti-bullying programs and substance abuse prevention. A big thank you to the save our youth task force is in order.

John Grzeblak
Livonia

SHARE YOUR OPINIONS

We welcome your letters to the editor. Please include your name, address and phone number for verification. We ask that your letters be 400 words or less. We may edit for clarity, space and content.

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QUOTABLE

"MDEQ, the county and the city are cooperating to move forward. We hope to have these additional results as soon as we can for the benefit of the citizens and all concerned."

- Assistant Wayne County Executive Alan Helmkamp, about an agreement for further investigation of Central City Park

WESTLAND Observer
PUBLISHED THURSDAY AND SUNDAY

GANNETT

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Our fundamental purposes are to enhance the lives of our readers, nurture the hometowns we serve and contribute to the business success of our customers.

Readers offer their suggestions on state financial crisis

We asked our readers what suggestions they would offer to Gov. Jennifer Granholm and state legislators as they work to deal with the state's budget crisis and economic slump. Here are some responses. For other responses, please go online to www.hometownlife.com.

Downsize government

Will Rogers once said, "Be glad you're not getting all the government you're paying for." Well, Michigan is in big trouble and we are not changing fast enough to reflect a global economy and global competition.

I will draw from some Big Three auto company parallels:

1) We need to downsize government. (Do we need a full-time state government?). We have more government than we can afford!

2) We can't afford what we had before — we need to reduce the cost across the board. With electronic tools (Internet), do away with all but a few offices. Secretary of State functions needs to be automated and outsourced.

3) Use the prison as a training ground for workers. You work in prison or you pay for it. Have prisoners do work for the taxpayer and the businesses in Michigan. Don't put nonviolent criminals in jail, give them the boot and monitor them, have them do public service.

4) Go to all the unions and employees with a competitive operating plan. They need to improve work practices and give concessions.

5) Education is important, but right now we are educating our kids and they are leaving the state because there are no Michigan jobs. It's a buyers' market and the people go where the work is, so Michigan needs to become the state of choice — and you don't do that by raising taxes.

6) Reduce welfare term and support only those that are unable to support themselves. Everyone that can work — for the state or for the nonprofits for the soup kitchen — we work together, but no free ride.

7) Freeze salaries and hiring and do away with the excess noncompetitive pension promises.

8) Outsource where you can get competitive bids and have no legacy costs.

J.B.
Livonia

Cut 10 percent of budget

It's simple to balance the budget: Cut each and every departmental budget by 10 percent.

Spend educational dollars on the teachers and students — not administration and BS!

Privatize — anything that can be found in the yellow pages does not need to be done by the state government.

Lower taxes to business and property owners to attract business and keep residents in the state.

Eliminate bureaucratic waste by eliminating middle and upper management.

Don't allow politics and popularity to get in the way when making decisions.

Improve morale by giving incentives to state workers for cost saving ideas that get implemented.

Keep it simple, stupid! Run the state budget like responsible families do — don't spend more than you make and save for the future!

Bob Sochacki
Livonia

Meeting the fiscal challenge

I offer the following thoughts on Michigan's fiscal challenges:

1. Stop whining about the governor's 12-member committee, including former Govs. Blanchard and Milliken, before it even delivers its recommendations on taxes and spending. There is value in consulting leaders who have faced similar challenges from that unique, CEO perspective. Would you have criticized President Bush for consulting former Presidents Carter and Ford about whether to invade Iraq? If Mr. Bush had consulted them, maybe we wouldn't have stepped into that quagmire.

2. Any solution must begin with the premise that there is no clear "win." Raising taxes is bound to be unpopular, but cutting taxes or state government spending hurts vital public services. We depend on these vital public services (e.g., police, education, child protection services) to make Michigan safe, vibrant and attractive.

For example, the Michigan Police Chiefs Association reports that there are 1,600 fewer police officers on the job in Michigan than before 9/11. In light of terrorist attacks on our own soil, shouldn't we be hiring more

police officers? Yet, because tax cuts and a declining economy have produced lower public revenues, we can no longer support those public service jobs. We cut the income tax and Single Business Tax starting in 2000, and look what we have done to ourselves.

Some argue that cutting taxes will stimulate growth. But historically at the state level, that strategy has not worked. Beginning in 2000, we cut the state income tax from 4.4 percent to its present 3.9 percent and what has it given us? Lower state government revenues and the second highest unemployment rate in the country. Because of the balanced budget requirement in our state constitution, when taxes are cut, spending must decrease to match lower revenues. When state government reduces spending, it contributes to lower aggregate spending, thus retarding economic growth.

My solution: a combination of reduced government spending and modest tax increases. I would: 1) increase the income tax to 4.1 percent (still 7 percent less than the 4.4 percent in effect during the '80s and '90s) or the sales tax to 7 percent; 2) eliminate the personal property tax on business, but fully replace the Single Business Tax revenues with a gross receipts tax applied to all Michigan businesses (at least 60,000 businesses pay no SBT); 3) replace the public teachers' defined benefit pension plan with a 401(k) type plan for all new hires; 4) to address this year's projected \$800 million deficit, cut general fund, state government spending by 2 percent; and 5) consolidate the duplicative Senate and House Fiscal Agencies.

Bill Richards
Beverly Hills

Restructure state taxes

In 1994, Boris Isaacson gave this idea to our former Gov. John Engler, who promptly turned it down. Last year, I wrote a state senator from Novi and she did write me back and said it was an interesting idea and would keep it in mind. I wrote our present governor as well and never even received a reply. I once again feel I have been dropped like a hot potato. Why?

Many do not know, but this state has over 1,000 taxes and fees levied against its citizens. In 1994, the total

sales in the state of Michigan was higher than \$6 trillion. (This figure was generated by the federal government, for which I have the formula.) The sales for the state after 12 years from 1994, should be at or around \$100 trillion. If you go to the computer, you will find nothing of these figures on there. I called the assistant treasurer and asked what the state's total sales tax was. He tried to give me the "state's gross product" information, which is not the same figure (much smaller). When I asked again, his reply was he did not know this figure — but he would try to find it and would call me back. I'm still waiting. I can't believe the state's Treasury Office didn't have it.

Don't you find it interesting that no one knows or wants us to know this information?

Could it be that the state government could wipe out all taxes, and I mean all the taxes and fees levied against us, such as property taxes, state income taxes, all sales taxes as we know them now, gas tax, luxury tax, no driver's license fees, no auto plate fees, no hunting fees etc. Do I have your attention? Every tax we pay could be gone.

The state has a budget of \$40 billion and can't make it. If they stopped all taxes and fees and taxed all sales in this state with no exceptions for anybody (what I mean is that everybody has to pay), here it is: If the state places a 1-percent sales tax on everything, including services, it would generate about \$100 billion and we only need \$40 billion. Would you pay 1 percent or even 2 percent on everything in order to get rid of all the other taxes you are paying now? Sure we would.

Let's think about this, and what it means for the average citizen. If you made \$50,000 and after your federal and SS taxes, Medicare taxes, let's say about 30 percent which equals about \$15,000 in taxes and leaves \$35,000 to spend. Under the new tax of 1 percent and if you spent everything you have left, your total state taxes would be \$350 for the year. If you didn't spend all your income, it would be less. Big corporations would want to bring their headquarters and plants here, because of the lower taxes, and this would generate many jobs.

Do you think people coming from other states, transferring, might want to pay a little higher for a home that does not have any property taxes? Gas

would come down by the amount of taxes we are paying now. As I see it, this is a win-win deal for everyone. Our leaders would have \$100 billion and we would have a big break in taxes. So for this, we would ask in the law that it be in writing, the state agrees to never, ever, raise taxes on its citizens again. Think about the the millions we would pick in taxes from people who do not file or avoid taxes under our present system. This is a fair tax on everybody.

Maybe there is something I don't see. I would be open to any good explanation why this would not work. There are those who will say it will hurt the poor. I don't see that at all, but should that be the case, the state has an extra \$60 billion they don't need. The sales tax system is already being used by the state. We only need to extend it to everyone selling something, including services.

Now, can you tell me why this governor and lawmakers don't want to even take a serious look at this? Can you tell me why the state Treasurer's Office did not have or did not want to let the information out on this state's total sales?

I think it is time we start thinking about doing the right things for our citizens and this great state.

Tom Williamson
Canton

Rein in spending

A tax increase will only be the catalyst for businesses and workers leaving the state. The state needs to balance its checkbook and rein in the spending.

There was an article in *The Detroit News* this weekend about the lack of need for intermediate school districts, which costs the state more than \$800 million. I think the state could take a look at either eliminating or consolidating.

Look at Medicaid and Medicare fraud ... or misspending.

Get rid of Stabenow ... maybe she was part of the reason Pfizer left.

The salaried auto workers now pay a larger portion of their health care costs, as do salaried retirees. Let's bring the teachers union to the table to renegotiate copays. Get rid of MESSA. Consolidate all health care for state workers.

Richard Doebe
Livonia

HAIL TO THE CONQUERING HEROES

Jane Fonda has lived near death, stricken with double pneumonia, AIDS, and a deadly septic shock infection, and major organ shutdown. Miraculously, she pulled through — thanks, she says, to those at U-M. Like Dr. Upchurch, who made her laugh despite her grave situation; her RN Patsy, who took time for the little things, like deciding what hair she did; and Kim B. Roberts, who taught her to walk again. And a few of the many who got her back to being the Mrs. Fonda her second young class remembers. It's why we say that long after you leave U-M, what stays with you are the people who were there for you along the way. That's the Michigan Difference.

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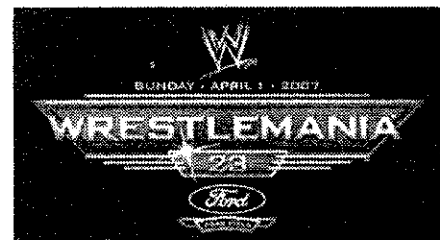
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Humane Society, colleges form partnership

The Michigan Humane Society has come up with the MHS Collegiate Partnership Program, an ongoing program targeted at Michigan universities to assist the Michigan Humane Society in a variety of programs.

This partnership will extend MHS' reach into the community, while providing valuable, hands-on experiences for collegiate organization members statewide.

Participating university organizations will have the opportunity to gain knowledge and hands-on experience through a number of communication and nonprofit marketing functions, including public relations, event planning and coordination, fund-raising and development, promotions and publicity.

"Michigan is fortunate to have some of the finest institutes for higher learning in the country; thereby providing our state with a wealth of talented individuals with the skills, commitment and energy to make a difference within our communities," said Michael Robbins, director of marketing and communications.

As part of its fund-raising efforts for the organization's annual Telethon, to air on WXYZ-TV Channel 7 on Feb. 14, MHS has challenged universities throughout the state of Michigan to an "apprentice-style" collegiate campaign.

The Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) at Michigan State University, the American Marketing Association (AMA) at Oakland University, and PR Central, a student run public relations firm at Central Michigan University are taking part in this year's challenge, each with a fund-raising goal of \$15,000 by Feb. 14.

"Our collegiate partnership program provides a forum to the students of these universities to gain real world experience in event planning, fund-raising, promotion, communication and much more," Robbins added. "In turn, the outreach and donation benefit MHS receives from these programs enables the organization to help the tens of thousand of additional animals in need.

"It's a win-win for all parties involved - Michiganians and Michiganians alike."

For more information on the Collegiate Partnership Program, or to get involved, call Stephanie Baron, public and media relations coordinator, at (248) 799-7400, Ext. 108, or by e-mail sbaron@michiganhumane.org.

The Michigan Humane Society is a private, nonprofit organization which cares for more than 100,000 animals each year at its three metro Detroit adoption and veterinary centers in Detroit, Rochester Hills and Westland. For more information, call (866) MHUMANE or visit the MHS Web site at www.michiganhumane.org.

MHS: Provide proper shelter for animals

It took a bit longer this year, but the chill of winter is here, and as temperatures drop, calls to the Michigan Humane Society Cruelty Hotline increase with reports of companion animals left outside with no shelter or other provisions.

Unfortunately, some calls arrive too late to save an animal left to fend for itself in brutal conditions. That's why the Michigan Humane Society urges all owners to take the necessary precautions this winter when caring for their companion animal.

The Michigan Humane Society recommends that companion animals live indoors all year long. However, if the animal must be outside, guardians should put proper provisions in place now before it becomes a life or death situation - and one for which they can be charged with animal

cruelty law violations. Misdemeanor animal cruelty charges can carry a sentence of up to 93 days in jail, up to a \$1,000 fine, community service and loss of pet ownership for a specified amount of time.

"The temperatures have begun to drop, and there have been several cold and wet days already that could be unbearable or life-threatening for a dog left outside," said Debby MacDonald, MHS senior cruelty investigator. "We encourage animal guardians to bring their dogs inside all year, especially during extreme weather conditions, but those who remain outside must have adequate protection from the elements."

"Now is the time to make sure proper shelter, plenty of nutritious food and unfrozen water are available."

When temperatures plummet, companion animals

should not be left outside for any length of time, according to the MHS. Even large or long-haired breeds cannot withstand severe or inclement weather. Bring small or short-haired dogs in when temperatures reach 15-20 degrees. Larger breeds and thick-coated dogs may remain outside, with adequate shelter, to about 0 degrees. Precipitation and severe wind chills should also be taken into account.

Cats should be kept permanently indoors or at least brought into a warm, animal proofed garage during severe weather. Roaming cats often seek the warmth of car engines, so knock on the car hood or honk the horn before starting your car to give them a chance to escape.

Increase food and water 10-20 percent for dogs left outside during the winter months. Check drinking water fre-

quently - every few hours - to make sure it hasn't frozen.

If an animal is cold to the touch, or his paws and ears have turned bright red, he may be suffering from frostbite. Move the animal to a warmer area and contact a veterinarian immediately.

Shelter is required by Michigan state law for dogs who must remain outdoors for any length of time. Adequate shelter means a well-built, insulated, slant-roofed dog house. The interior should be just large enough for the dog to stand and to lie down comfortably. It should be slightly elevated from the ground for air circulation. The door should face away from prevailing winds and have a protective flap to eliminate drafts. Clean, dry straw should always be provided for bedding rather than towels, rugs or blankets that absorb moisture and may

quickly freeze.

Several types of inadequate shelter frequently encountered by investigators include an unheated garage or shed, a dog house that is too large or lacks straw, or dogs simply tied out to a porch, fence or deck with no shelter at all.

The MHS's four cruelty investigators and one field agent handle approximately 4,000 cases of animal cruelty each year in Detroit, Hamtramck and Highland Park. Suspected animal cruelty or neglect in these cities should be reported by calling the MHS Cruelty Hotline at (313) 872-3401. A confidential message can be left 24 hours a day.

Elsewhere, suspected animal cruelty should be reported immediately to the local animal control or police.

For more information, call 1-866-MHUMANE or visit www.michiganhumane.org.

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Wednesday, February 7**

10 a.m. to Noon and 1 to 3 p.m.
Courtyard Marriott - Warren
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Thursday, February 8**

10 a.m. to Noon and 1 to 3 p.m.
St. Clair Inn
500 N. Riverside, St. Clair

Friday, February 9**

10 a.m. to Noon and 1 to 3 p.m.
Courtyard Marriott - Livonia
17200 N. Laurel Park Drive, Livonia

Monday, February 12**

10 a.m. to Noon and 1 to 3 p.m.
HAP Southfield Office Tower 14,
21700 Northwestern Hwy., Southfield

Tuesday, February 13**

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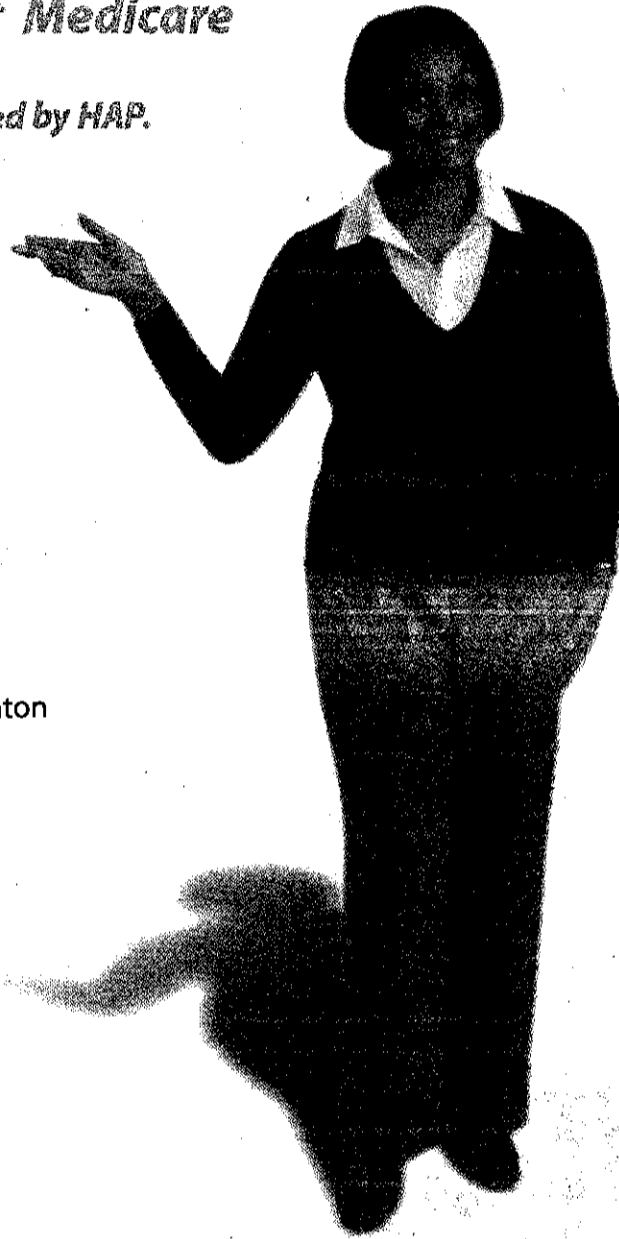
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Panel finds solutions to area's segregation problem are few

BY ALEX LUNDBERG
STAFF WRITER

While solutions are few and far between, the causes of racial segregation in southeast Michigan are many and varied, according to a roundtable of experts who gathered at Madonna University Jan. 23.

The roundtable at the university's Kresge Hall was the second in a three-part discussion of race in the metro Detroit area, "Bridging the Racial Divide," which has been broadcast on public television station WTVS-Channel 56.

The panel discussions are interspersed with taped interviews of southeast Michigan residents from the region.

The panel was moderated by former WDIV anchorman Emery King and WJR radio host Paul W. Smith. The panel members were United Way's Kurt Metzger, DTE's Paul Hillegonds, *Detroit Free Press* columnist Rochelle Riley, *Detroit News* columnist Nolan Finley, Oakland University Professor Dr. Toni Walters and University of Michigan Professor L'Heureux Lewis.

The show will air 10 p.m. Monday, Feb. 5, on Channel 56 as well as be aired on WDET FM 101.9 and WJR AM 760.

COLOR LINES

King said Livonia had the distinction of being the whitest big city in the nation—96 percent white. Warren came in ninth whitest, again nationally, at 92 percent.

By comparison, Smith said Detroit is the second blackest city in America (behind Gary, Ind.). He said nine out of 10



Former WDIV Anchorman Emery King, left, and WJR radio personality Paul W. Smith, right, record an episode of 'Bridging the Racial Divide' at Madonna University Tuesday night. The episode will air on WTVS Ch-56 on Monday, Feb. 5.

black residents of southeast Michigan live in Detroit, Southfield, Inkster, Pontiac and Highland Park.

Overall, he said, the numbers make the region the most racially segregated area in the U.S.

Metzger said one of the reasons for this segregation is the ongoing effect of a lack of mass transportation.

"It exacerbates the situation," he said. "People don't have to take mass transportation and therefore don't have to have any contact with people they don't know."

The lack of casual contact creates a distance where other isolations can spring up.

Eventually, isolation becomes a petri dish for the deeper issues of segregation, namely an adversarial posture.

Hillegonds said part of the problem comes from the winner/loser dynamic of race politics. Movement of any kind is presumed to come with a price.

"When you try to bring the region together you get into that win/lose thinking," he said. "People wonder what the cost is? Who pays?"

In this case, the city of Detroit has paid dearly. While middle-class blacks are following middle-class whites' example of leaving the city for the suburbs, no one has replaced that population.

Finley said the movement of people from Detroit hasn't been mirrored by a movement into the city by anyone. Riley said whites have responded by moving further out, something Finley said wasn't the case in Livonia.

"In Livonia you're seeing well-accepted integration," he said. "Blacks are moving in

and people are not selling their houses, there's no white flight."

Lewis said that's no indication of anything.

"When you talk about the black population doubling in Livonia, you're going from one to two," he said. "I'm not impressed."

BRINGING PEOPLE BACK

Metzger said the idea of middle-class whites coming back to the city might be unrealistic.

"They probably won't come back," he said. "The city is not going to solve this situation by itself. The region has disinvested in the city."

Riley didn't agree completely, she said the city has to work to bring new people to the city, not ones that have already left.

"We have to find other targets to lure to the city," she said. "It can't be people with fond memories of Hudson's, it's not there anymore."

"Whether Detroit pushes to get back the population that left or chooses to entice a new core of residents, the condition of its school system is going to be a serious stumbling block in the way of its efforts."

"The district has sprawl and there are buildings with no people in them," Walters said. "Some kids are going to have

to travel a long way to get to school, kids in rural districts have done the same thing for years."

Lewis said the region is going to have to realize that the needs of the kids in the Detroit district far outstrip the needs of kids in the suburbs.

But need alone isn't going to move a lot of hearts considering other factors at play in the Detroit Schools.

"Fifty percent of all of the district's revenues go to the administration," Finley said. "It's not just how the schools are funded, it's how that money is spent."


Hillegonds said the most depressing case of segregation going on in Detroit is the economic—not racial—segregation in the schools.

The upshot of the segregation, he said, is that entrenched beliefs or the lack of bus service, is that the entire region suffers whether or not individuals see that as the case.

"When people think about where to move their business, our reputation is hurting us," Hillegonds said. "The regions being redeveloped are the ones with strong core cities that have great assets. This is how the cost of segregation is hitting us."

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Wandering through the January thaw

"In all things of nature there is something of the marvelous."
— Aristotle

The January thaw should be upon us, even though we never had December's freeze. No matter: Nature remains full of adventure discovery with some creatures remaining on normal cycle, others behaving a bit like crazed golfers relishing in those warmer winter days. And that's the way it has been ever since the last great glacial retreat.

Skunks should have been stuffed into crevices, hollow trunks and woodchuck burrows; cuddled up together to conserve warmth. They should not be wandering now. Skunks do not hibernate but they are rarely seen out and about in January until the mating urge sends males wandering through yards in search of a quick night of February love.

Not so this winter, perhaps heavy rains flushed a few out of soggy dens. All I know is one was in my barn pawing about under old straw remnants for hidden morsels. I let my well-armed striped visitor wander about the barn and then back into the snow-speckled meadow.



On Nature

Jonathan Schechter

Muskrat lodges and push ups (push ups are tapered lodge-like feeding structures in marshes) normally stand out above marsh ice. No ice. But no matter for muskrats; a mild winter makes submergent travel easy and on sunny days some emerge from their winter water world to snack on exposed shore side vegetation. But there's a dark side to what we perceive as easy living for this musky water rat. No ice means predators have easy access. That too is nature's way ... and one such predator is the mink.

Mink are not a rare species in Oakland County, but their world is not our world. In a winter of snows, their undulating, leaping, bounding, tunneling tracks and trails can be found along ravines of Paint Creek, marshlands of West Bloomfield, at Independence Oaks County Park, and in the Ortonville and Bald Mountain State Recreation Areas. And of

Following mink tracks in snow is a marvelous if not slightly hazardous adventure of discovery as trails leads along waterways, over thin ice and into cattail marshlands. Muskrats are a rich and meaty reward for the mink, and the pickings are easy this winter.

course, my favorite wandering through winter grounds: Holly State Recreation Area, a nearly 8,000-acre wild wonderland with a heavy glacial footprint of lakes, ponds, marshes and hills.

But this near snowless season I have not found a signal track of the lean and muscular mink, a carnivorous high-energy creature that is the worst nightmare of muskrats, meadow mice and sluggish fish. Following mink tracks in snow is a marvelous if not slightly hazardous adventure of discovery as trails leads along waterways, over thin ice and into cattail marshlands. Muskrats

are a rich and meaty reward for the mink, and the pickings are easy this winter. Mink slip into their lodges, and keep the commandeered home as a home sweet vacation home after having the resident rat as a scaly-tailed dinner.

Follow mink tracks in a snowy winter and you will find evidence of what I can only interpret as play as tunnels and tracks twist and turn on slopes. Some wildlife biologists may disagree with my play proclamation, but why should play be the sole right of humans?

And in cities and towns, villages and suburbs of Oakland County a cornucopia of doves, jays, cardinals, house sparrows and chickadees, and squirrels too, scrounge side by side on bird feeder spillage providing a plethora of feathery and furry treats for the fast flying Coopers Hawk and powerful red-tailed hawk. Talk to woods-wise deputies of the sheriff's department "north patrol" and they tell of nocturnal creatures on the move. All of this is nature's way in winter that is not quite right, but not really wrong either.

Jonathan Schechter writes on nature's way. He may be reached at oaknature@aol.com.



New trustee

Michigan Supreme Court Justice Marilyn Kelly (right) was on hand Jan. 24 to swear in new Schoolcraft College Trustee Joan A. Gebhardt. In December the trustees appointed Gebhardt, a Livonia resident, to fill a vacancy on the seven-member governing board. The seat carries a six-year term and is up for election in May 2007.



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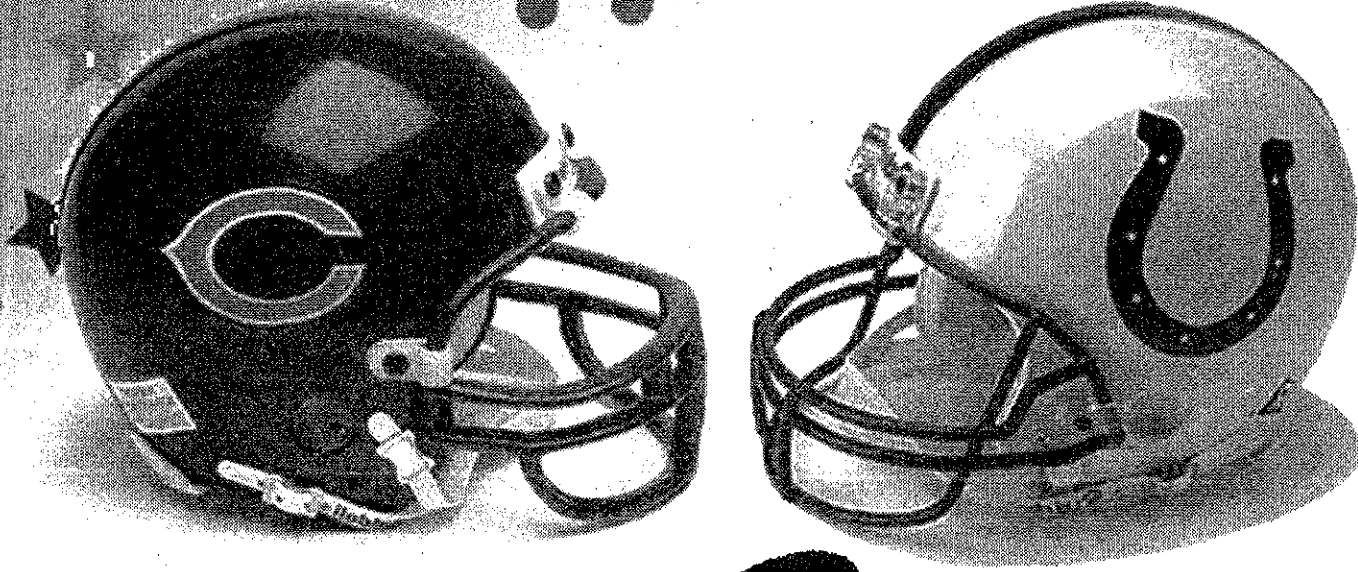
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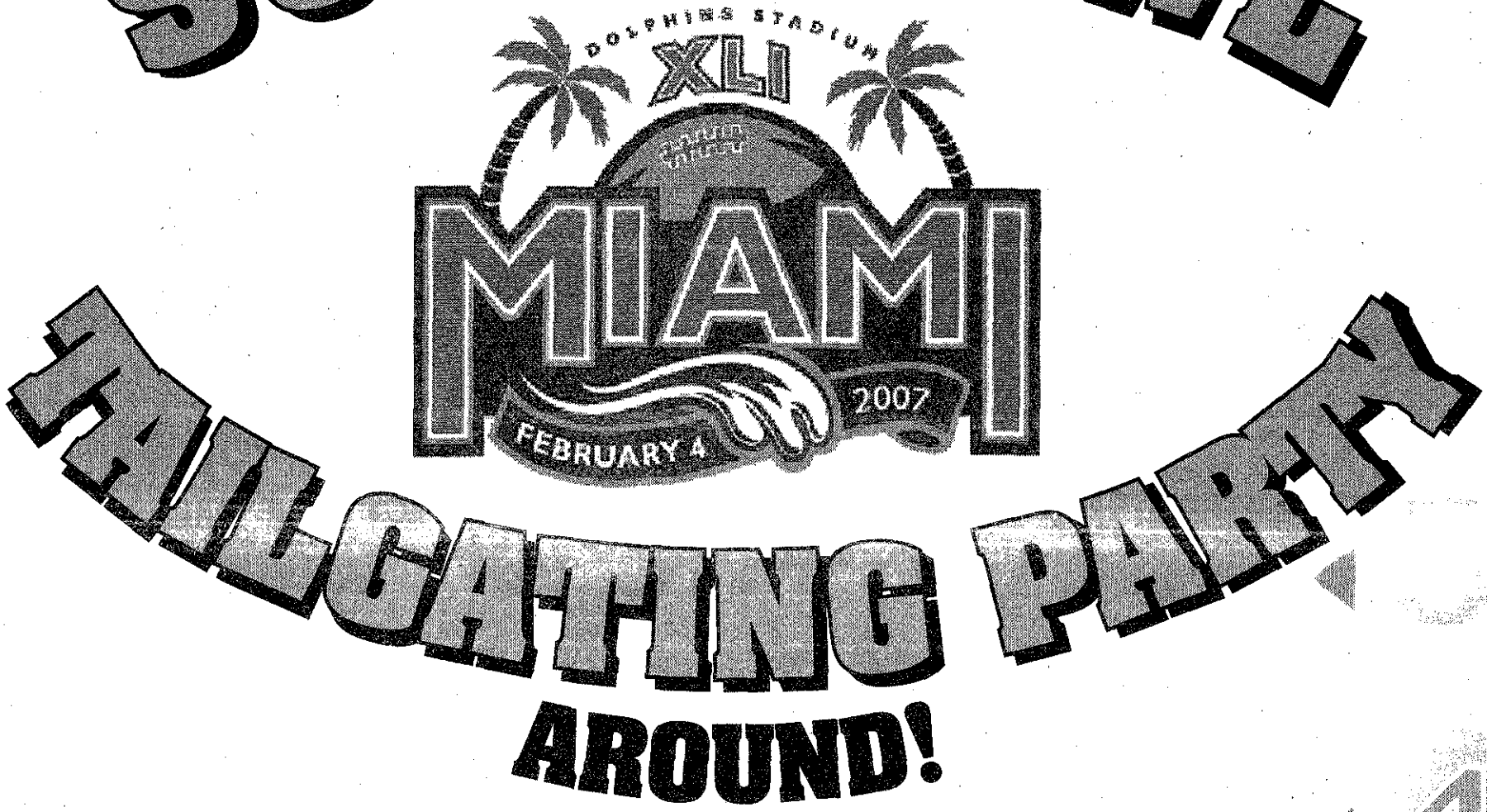


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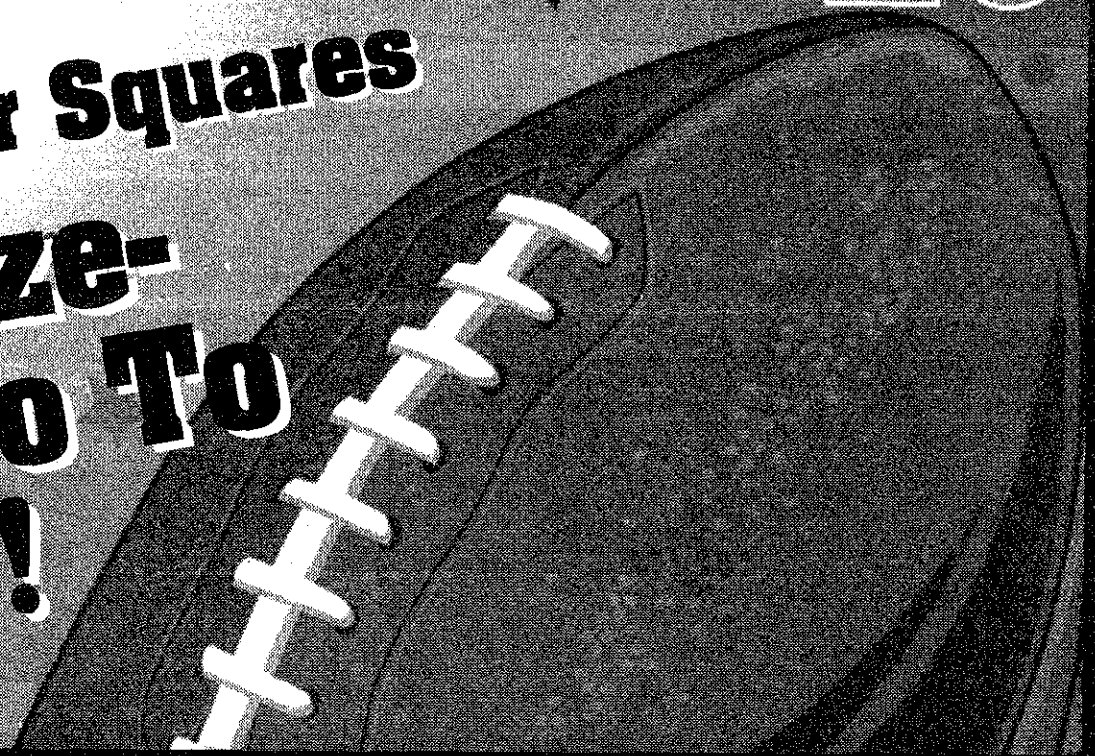
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If you want to submit an item for the religion calendar, fax it to (734) 591-7279 or write: Religion Calendar, Observer Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150.

FEBRUARY

Divorce recovery Workshop 7-9:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 1 and continues every Thursday for seven weeks, presented by Single Point

Adult Ministries (30 years and older) at Ward Presbyterian Church 4000 Six Mile, west of Haggerty, Northville.

Love's Secrets 7-9 p.m. Thursday, February 1, 8:15, 22, at St. Aidan Catholic Church, 17500

Farmington Road, north of Six Mile, Livonia. The series examines Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical, Deus Caritas Est - God is Love.

International student day Presented by Church Women United, Suburban Detroit-West (MI 063) Friday, Feb. 2, at Redford/Aldersgate United

Methodist Church, 10000 Beech Daly, between Plymouth and W. Chicago roads. Potluck luncheon at 12:15 p.m.

Buddy Greene concert Includes a wide variety of traditional American influences ranging from country and bluegrass to folk, gospel and blues 7 p.m. Friday, Feb. 2, in Knox Hall at Ward Presbyterian Church 4000 Six Mile, west of Haggerty, Northville.

Gathering of eagles Conference Feb. 2-4, at the Embassy Suites Hotel, 28100 Franklin Road, Southfield. Meetings begin 7:30 p.m.

Superbowl party Alcohol free Superbowl Party for anyone who wants to enjoy the company of their neighbors 5 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 4,

at Unity of Livonia, 28660 Five Mile, between Inkster and Middlebelt. The football game will be on big-screen TV

Grief support For widowed men and women in all stages of grief, covers copings with loss of a spouse, loneliness and other issues

Pipe organs plus Concert 4 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 4, at Kirk in the Hills, 1340 West Long Lake Road, Bloomfield Hills.

Bible study The Gospels and You Bible Study begins 7 p.m. Monday, Feb. 5, at The Basilica of St. Mary Orthodox Church activity center

Grief workshop From Grief to New Hope 7:45 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 5, and continues for eight weeks, at Ward Presbyterian Church

Valentine card party 6:30-10 p.m. Friday, Feb. 9, at S.S. Simon and Jude Church, 32500 Palmer, Westland.

Blood drive American Red Cross holds a blood drive 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 11, in the Parish Hall at St. Edith Catholic Church

Education pilgrimage The third annual education pilgrimage of faith and hope to El Salvador is being organized by Our Lady of Good Counsel Catholic Church in Plymouth, assisted by CRISPAZ (Christians for Peace in El Salvador).

Pasties fund-raiser Pasties are \$3 each and can be ordered by calling Newburg United Methodist Church at (734) 422-0149.

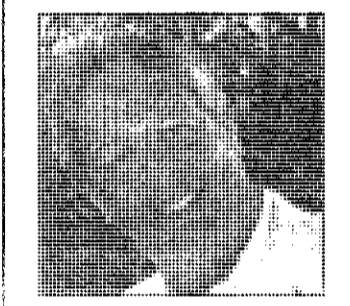
VBS preview Preview the offerings for this summer's Vacation Bible Schools 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 17, at Ward Presbyterian Church, 40000 Six Mile, west of Haggerty, Northville.

PLEASE SEE CALENDAR, NEXT PAGE



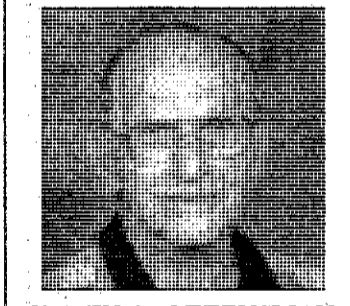
CORRINE ANN BADENHOP

of Stockbridge, MI. Age 51 passed away at home on January 21, 2007. She was born the daughter of William and Carol (Stark) McGarvey on August 19, 1955 in Highland Park, MI.



DWIGHT WILSON LEONARD

January 29, 2007 Age 64. Beloved husband of Linda (nee. Matthews). Son of Florence Leonard, Dear father of Rick (Linda) and Leigh Leonard Boyd (Bob).



ERWIN R. OTTENSMAN

January 28, 2007, age 100 of Plymouth. Beloved husband of the late Gertrude. Dear father of Rita-Mae A. Notestine, Arlan J. (Yvonne), Richard E. (Nancy), and Luann E. (Tom) Garchow.

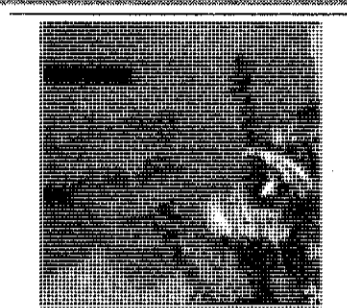
GEORGE M. ADAMS

Age 59, January 28, 2007. Survived by spouse, Mary Ellen "Dede". Loving father of George C. "Tripp" (Becky), Katharine "Kate", and Ellen (Scott) Hamel.



LOIS A. SHOEMAKER

(nee. Lane) January 26, 2007. Age 85. Resident of Beverly Hills, MI and Naples, FL. Beloved wife of the late Robert H. Dearest mother of Roger (Janet) of Bloomfield Hills, MI and Richard of Chicago, IL.

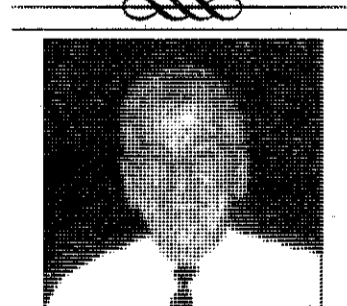


PATRICIA MEADOWS CRAIG

Age 73, of Garden City, passed away January 27, 2007. Beloved mother of Mark Hammar, Scott Hammar, Pamela (Sobhi) Safah and Laurie (Mike) Ziolkowski.

PETER H. MORSE, JR.

Age 36, of Berkeley, CA, formerly of Bloomfield Hills died Saturday, January 13, 2006. A 1988 graduate of Andover High School, Pete did his undergraduate studies at DePaul University and received his doctorate of history from Binghamton University in 2006.



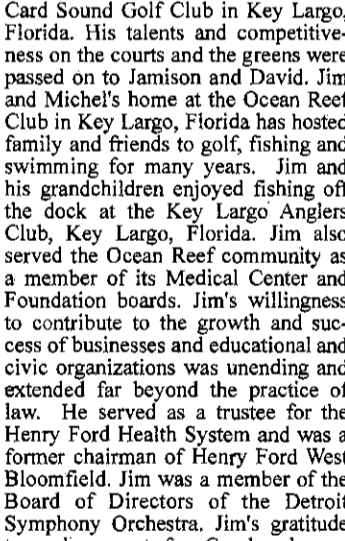
THOMAS J. COURLAS

Age 93 of Westland, January 29, 2007. Beloved husband of Shirley, dear father of James (Lynne) Courlas, David (Debbie) Courlas, and Thomas Courlas.



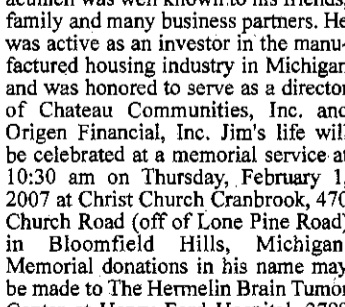
JAMES A. WILLIAMS

Jim passed away at the age of 64, in the company of his family, on Monday morning at Henry Ford Hospital after a heroic battle over nearly six years with cancer.



MARY B. EKBERG

June 30, 1922 - Jan. 26, 2007 Mary, fondly referred to as Maisie by her late husband Walt, passed away in peace on January 26th in Portland, Oregon after fulfilling a life full of grit and grace.



MARY P. CHIKA

January 31, 2007, Age 91 of Bloomfield Hills. Wife of the late John J. Chika. Dear mother of John M. (Donna), Mary Miela (the late Richard), Barbara Jensen (Robert) and James P. (Janice).

May You Find Comfort in Family & Friends

Paying Tribute to the Life of Your Loved One

OBITUARY POLICY The first five "billed" lines of an obituary are published at no cost. All additional lines will be charged at \$4 per line.

Continuing education classes offer variety

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER

Sandy Baumann isn't clowning around when she says Henry Ford Community College's Center for Lifelong Learning offers a variety of classes. In addition to workshops that teach students how to create a balloon animal and wear a red nose, students can participate in a discussion about Christians, Jews and Muslims living in peace.

"We have everything from car maintenance for women held in a car repair facility to Journey towards Peace based on the three faces on Abraham," said Sandy Baumann, Center for Lifelong Learning program manager and a Farmington Hills resident. "The Bible, Koran and the Torah challenge people to work towards peace. The interfaith discussion is with an imam, minister, rabbi, and representative of the archdiocese, and on March 18 there's a bus tour of a church, synagogue and mosque. These are important topics especially with the trouble in the middle east.

"The interfaith is brand new. We have a department of religious studies here. I think it's exciting operating off of the concept let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me. If we break down our misconceptions we can see everyone as family and focus on commonalities rather than our differences."

On a lighter note, Start Clowning Around by taking a workshop 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 3, at a clown studio at 17841 Poplar Avenue in Riverview. Professional clown Carey Ann (Carol Ann Owens) teaches students how to apply makeup, perform magic tricks and clown at parades, hospitals, festivals, and parties. Carey Ann suggests participants wear comfortable clothing bring any clown items they own. The workshop is open to persons ages 16 to 90. The cost is \$49 with a \$7 materials fee due in class to cover supplies. Registration deadline is Thursday, Feb. 1.

Carey Ann keeps clowning around in an advance course 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Sat. Feb. 17, at the clown studio in Riverview. She'll help students select their clown name and perfect their look with makeup and props. Learn to walk like a clown, create more intricate balloon work, and rehearse funny skits. Carey Ann will also reveal local clowning opportunities. Start Clowning Around or previous clowning experience required. Cost is \$49 plus \$7 materials fee due to instructor in class for supplies. Registration deadline is Feb. 15.

"We need more joy in life and this gal helps people appear as clowns," said Baumann, "and the classes are open to ages 16 to 90."

Car Maintenance for Savvy Women takes place in the heated bays of the automotive repair center at 15735 Schaefer, near Six Mile, in Detroit 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 17.

Gayle Clark teaches students how to expand their car's longevity in a hands-on class. Learn how to change oil and tires, evaluate tire pressure and quality, translate repair terminology, and find out about batteries and fuses. The class is limited to eight women (age 18 and up) and ideal for those who drive older vehicles or used cars. The cost is \$33. Registration deadline is Feb. 15.

Tour a Church, Synagogue & Mosque 12:45 -5:15 p.m. Sunday, March 18. Explore the beauty and architecture of three houses of faith including Gesu Catholic Church in Detroit built in modified Spanish Mission architecture, the Conservative Jewish synagogue of Congregation Shaarey

Zedek in Southfield, and the Islamic Center of America's mosque in Dearborn with its golden domes. Enjoy a Middle Eastern pastry and beverage on the tour. Cost is \$35. The bus departs from the Center for Lifelong Learning, 22586 Ann Arbor Trail, Dearborn Heights. Registration required by Feb. 16.

Take a Journey toward Peace with Christians, Jews & Muslims 6:30-9 p.m. Tuesday, March 13, in the Rosenau Room, Mazzara ASCC Building at Henry Ford Community College, 5101 Evergreen, Dearborn. Speakers include Imam

Hassan Al-Qazwini from the Islamic Center of America in Dearborn, Rabbi Jonathan Berkun from Congregation Shaarey Zedek in Southfield, Rev. Mary Biedron from North Congregational Church in Farmington Hills, and Michael Hovey, Assistant Advisor on Ecumenical and Interfaith Affairs for the Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit. The cost is \$15. Deadline for registration is March 9.

For more information or to register for any of the classes, call (877) 855-5252 or visit the Web site at www.hfcc.edu/CL2.

lchomin@hometownlife.com | (734) 953-2145



New deputies

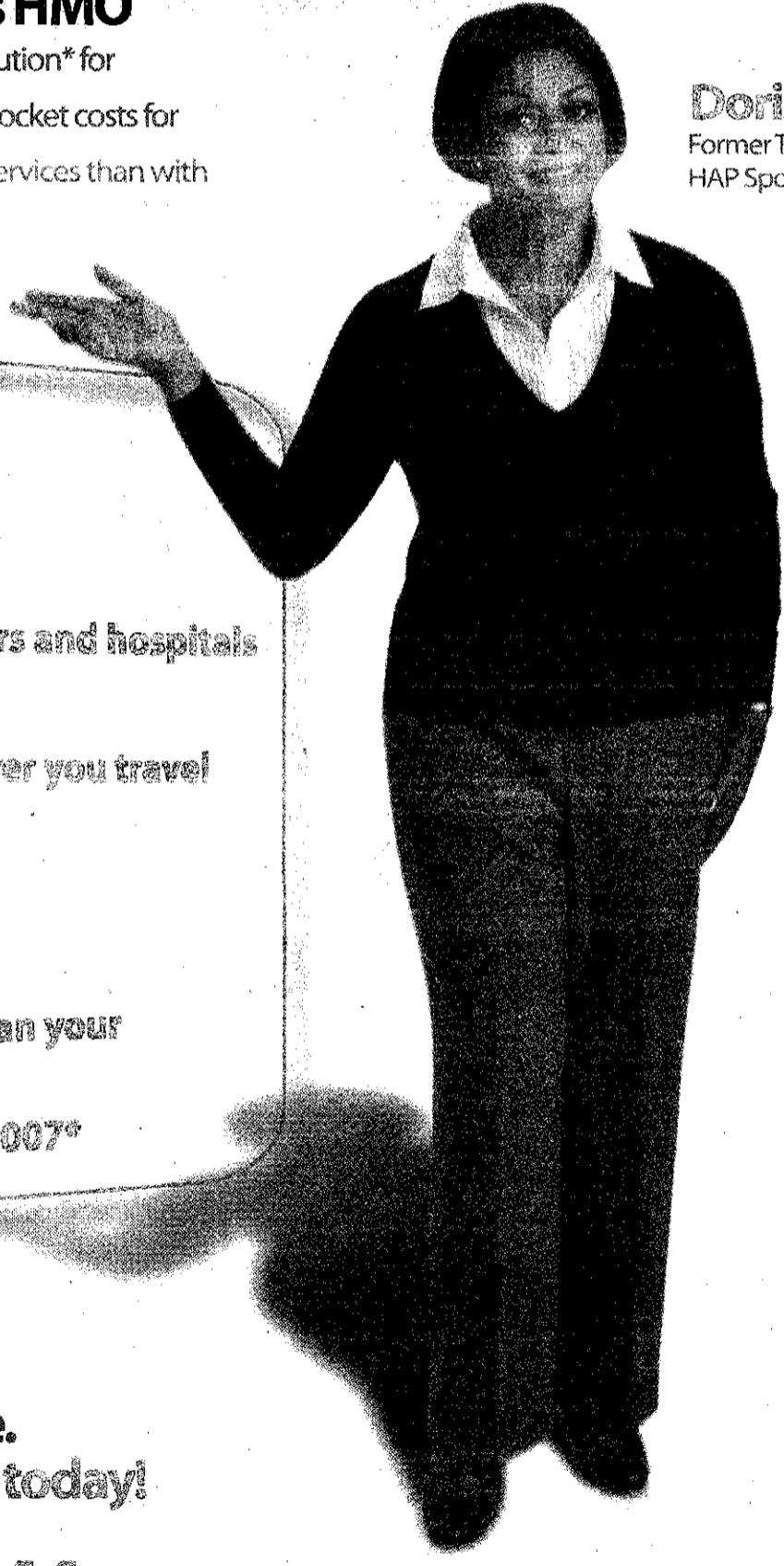
Wayne County Sheriff Warren C. Evans (front row, center) recently swore-in 58 new deputies who graduated from the sheriff's training academy, including several from the western Wayne County communities of Redford, Westland and Livonia. Pictured with the sheriff are Livonia resident Andrew Stevens (front left), Redford resident Rachael Davis and (back row l-r) Westland residents Thomas Blalock, Ronald Tokarszyk and Eric Kusnir.

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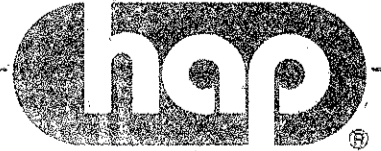


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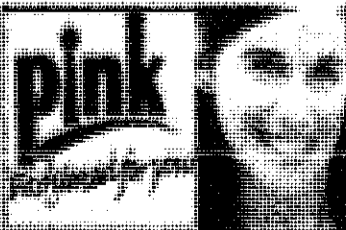
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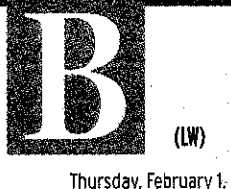
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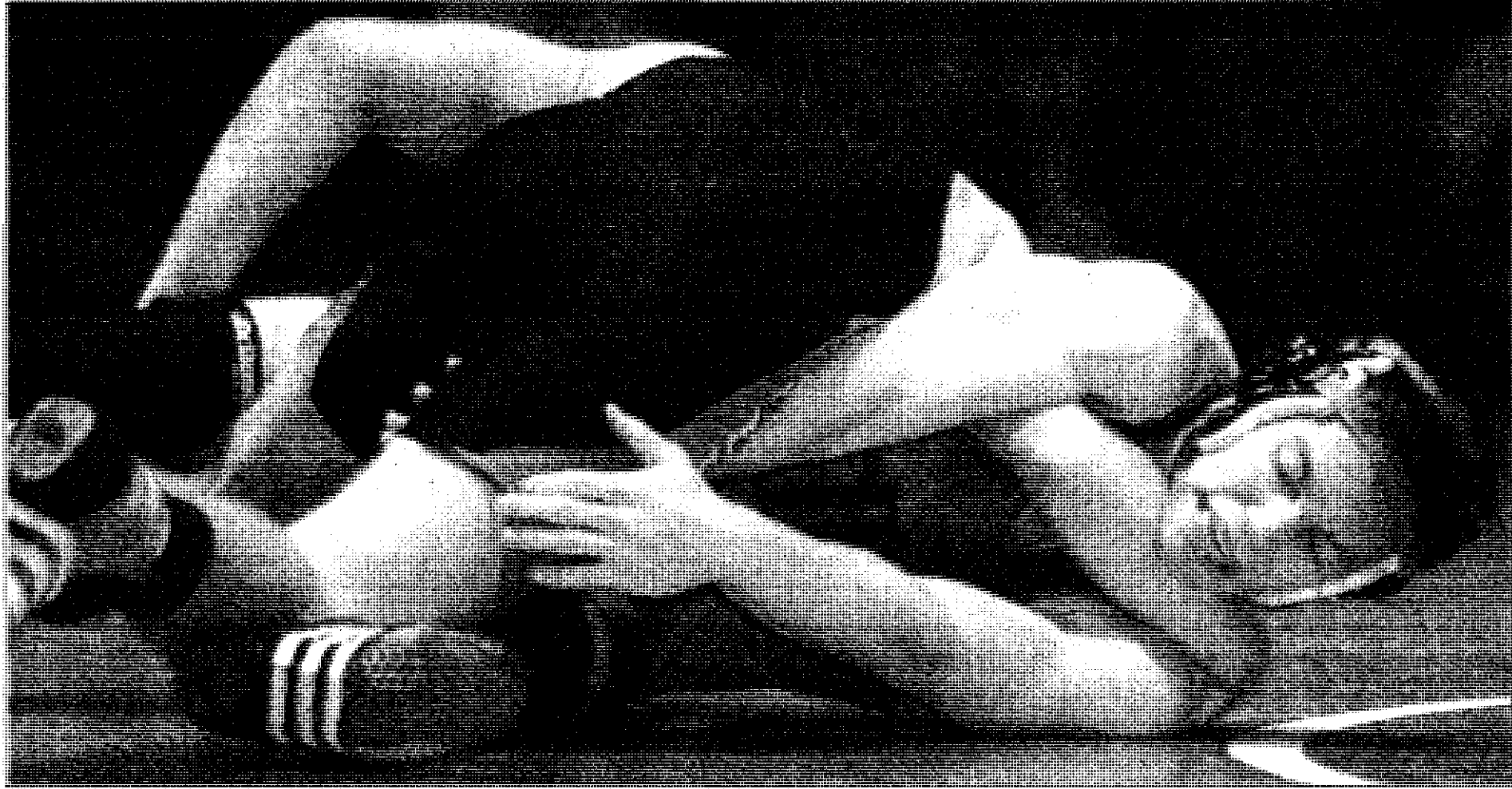
SPORTS



The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers

Brad Emons, editor . (734) 953-2123 . bemoons@hometownlife.com

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Franklin's Josh Billiau (bottom) was runner-up to Belleville's Dustin Zak in the 125-pound class at Saturday's Observerland Invitational.

PHOTOS BY TOM HOFFMEYER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Sidelines

Kesler injures hip

Livonia native and Vancouver Canucks center Ryan Kesler, who had six goals and 10 assists in 48 games this season, is scheduled to undergo hip surgery on Monday and will more than likely miss the rest of the regular season. The 22-year-old Kesler, a Churchill High graduate who played one season at Ohio State, experienced soreness in his hip before the recent All-Star break. He was expected to play through the injury, but that changed after visiting Dr. Marc Philippon, who also performed hip surgery on Canucks center Brendan Morrison last summer. The 6-foot-2, 205-pound Kesler, the Canucks' former No. 1 draft pick, is expected to miss three to four months. In his third NHL season, Kesler has 18 goals and 26 assists in 158 games.

Moss recalled

Back and forth, back and forth for Livonia native and Catholic Central High graduate Dave Moss. The 25-year-old left winger was recalled Friday by the Calgary Flames of the National Hockey League after being sent down to the Omaha Ak-Sar Ben Knights of the American Hockey League on Jan. 22. It will be rookie's third stint with the Flames since December. Through 18 games, the University of Michigan product has an impressive six goals and three assists for the Northwest Division leaders. The 6-foot-3, 205-pound Moss is expected to say until Chuck Kobasew (concussion) is 100 percent healthy and is ready to play in consecutive games.

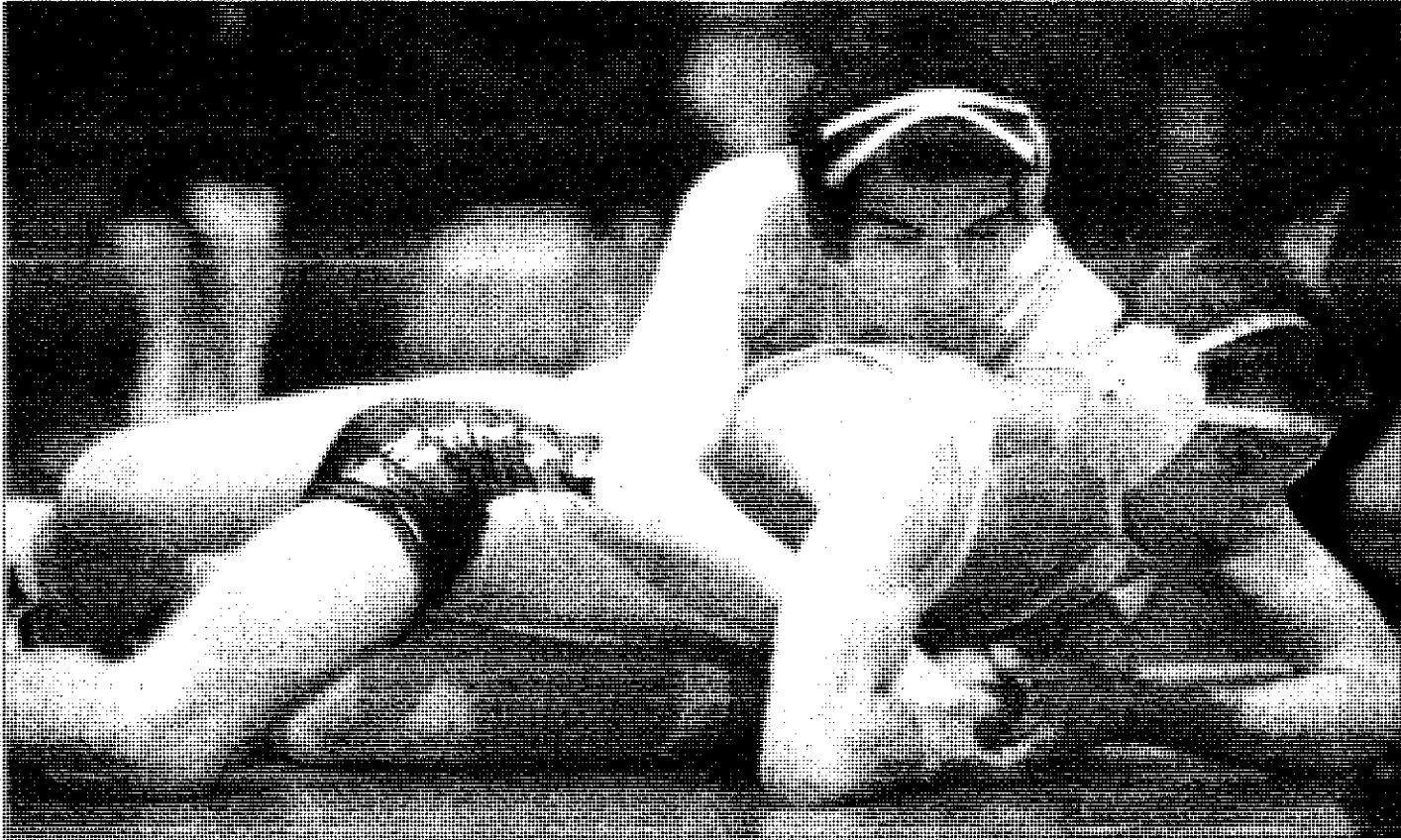
Karbo leads MSU

Livonia resident Linda Karbo will guide the Michigan State University squad at the first collegiate division competition in the 28th annual Mid American Pompon, Inc. State Championship beginning at 9 a.m. Sunday at Eastern Michigan University's Convocation Center. Pompon teams from the University of Michigan and Central Michigan University will also participate. Karbo earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from MSU in 2005. She is a 2001 graduate of Farmington Hills Mercy High School. Karbo was a four-year member of the pompon team there and a two-year member of the Mid American All Star Team. Karbo currently coaches the MSU Pompon team, which was founded in 2005 for those who wanted to continue and perform beyond the high school level. The MSU squad consists of 21 sophomores, juniors and seniors who have represented the school at various campus events and fundraisers, along with competitions and special appearances including the Detroit Auto Show.

Franklin finds a way again at Observerland

BY BRAD EMONS
STAFF WRITER

Livonia Franklin captured its third straight Observerland Invitational wrestling tournament championship Saturday, and no one loomed larger than Franklin heavyweight Kyle Brown. The Patriots had the team title wrapped up before the individual finals started and wound up with 213 points, followed by runner-up Westland John Glenn (186), Belleville (175.5), Canton (169) and Novi-Detroit Catholic Central (164). Host Livonia Churchill took sixth with 117. Brown, an underdog in the night's final match — the 285-pound division — came up big as he pulled off the upset of the tournament, rallying from a 5-1 deficit to pin Canton's Donnie Laramie, the top seed, in the second period. Brown, the only individual winner on the day for the Patriots, was mobbed by his teammates afterward. The win, which created a buzz among the remaining crowd and participating wrestlers, also put a huge smile on coach Dave Chiola's face. "It was nice to end on that note," Chiola said. "The last match made us walk out of here feeling a little better about ourselves. We could go into practice this week with our heads held high." Laramie nearly had Brown, who was named upper weights MVP, pinned during the first period, but the Franklin heavyweight regrouped and pulled to within one before making his move. "They (Brown and Laramie) could meet three more times this year," Chiola said. "Last year, I think they met four times and I think he (Laramie) had three pins and a major (decision) against Kyle. But Kyle has gotten a lot better since last year. Hopefully, this will give him confidence in the future." Eleven of Franklin's 14 wrestlers reached the semifinals, but the Patriots came up empty in two other finals until Brown's win. "The last two rounds were unspeakable, horrible," Chiola said. "We were losing one- and two-point matches, losing at the buzzer, losing to kids we had beaten before. "But the beauty of this team is that our points were well-dispersed. We had 14 score and 12 placed. Last year, we had 10



John Glenn's James Zerebiny (top) edged Salem's Jeremy Epley, 3-2, for the 152-pound title in Saturday's Observerland Invitational hosted by Churchill.

in the semifinals and this year we had 11. That's hard to compete with. Somebody across the board always picks us up each week and that keeps them humble." First-time invitee Belleville had five gain the finals, with Justin Fleeason (112) and Dustin Zak (125) earning crowns. Zak decided Franklin's Brandon Billiau, 9-2, while Fleeason held off Canton's Carl Lucke, 7-5. Glenn, Canton and Wayne Memorial were next with four finalists apiece. Glenn's strong showing was fueled by first-place finishers James Zerebiny (152), who edged Salem's Jeremy Epley by a point, 3-2, for the second time in three days, and Shamir Garcia (215), who held off Wayne's Robert Coffey, 6-4. The Rockets' Scott Brown also was a surprise as he pulled off a couple of impressive wins en route to the finals at 160 before losing to Livonia Stevenson's Ziad Kharbush, 4-2.

PLEASE SEE OBSERVERLAND, B3

OBSERVERLAND WRESTLING RESULTS

16th annual
OBSERVERLAND INVITATIONAL WRESTLING TOURNAMENT
Jan. 27 at Livonia Churchill

TEAM STANDINGS: 1. Livonia Franklin, 213 points; 2. Westland John Glenn, 186; 3. Belleville, 175.5; 4. Canton, 169.5; 5. Novi-Detroit Catholic Central, 164.5; 6. Livonia Churchill, 117; 8. Wayne Memorial, 86; 9. Lutheran Westland, 86; 10. Salem, 74.5; 11. Farmington, 51.5; 12. Plymouth, 48; 13. Redford Union, 44; 14. North Farmington, 33.5; 15. Garden City, 33.5; 16. Livonia Clarenceville, 6; 17. Farmington Hills Harrison, 4.

CHAMPIONSHIP RESULTS
103 pounds: Donnie Watkins (Canton) decisioned Chad Dunn (WM), 10-5; 3rd place: Namic Kerimov (NF) dec. Tommy Myszock (LS), 10-9; 5th place: Anthony Pavlich (WJG) dec. Grant Phillips (LF), 7-5.
112: Justin Fleeason (Bell.) dec. Carl Lucke (Canton), 7-5; 3rd: Ben Kosmalki (Ply.) won by major dec. over Jared Plekunik (LF), 12-4; 5th: Greg Hogan (NF) dec. Kevin Bennett (Salem), 7-4.
119: Jamie Preiss (WM) pinned Nieko Ianni (CC), 5:56; 3rd: Sean Meixner (RU) dec. James Benitez (LF), 2-1; 5th: Seth Wald (NF) won by major dec. over Justin Johnson (GC), 11-2.
125: Austin Zak (Bell.) dec. Josh Billiau (LF), 9-2; 3rd: Jeremiah Austin (WJG) dec. Nick Steiger (Salem), 7-4; 5th: Steve Cox (Canton) p. Andrew Murray (LC), 2:45.
130: Greg Roberts (LC) p. Brian Augsburg (Bell.), 3:22; 3rd: Brent Winehoff (Canton) won by major dec. over Nick Shak (WJG), 10-2; 5th: Trevor O'Connor (CC) p. Kevin Hayter (Salem), 4:44.
135: Shea Hasenauer (CC) won by technical fall over Jon Roos (LF), 19-4; 3rd: Jim Wood (WJG) dec. J.P. Gaffke (LC), 2-1; 5th: Jacob Losen (Bell.) p. Kyle Muller (Farm.), 2:16.
140: Corey Phillips (Canton) dec. Steve Coak (Bell.), 7-1; 3rd: Jason Zanger (LF) p. Gramos Pallaska (LC), 1:37; 5th: Jon Reale (LS) won by major dec. over Justin Kane (Salem), 9-0.
145: Matt Edwards (LV) p. Steve Sherman (Bell.), 0:58; 3rd: Elvin Ferreira (LF) dec. Jon Sanders (Canton), 8-7; 5th: Dennis Villarreal (Farm.) p. Allen Frantsen (LC), 1:15.
152: James Zerebiny (WJG) dec. Jeremy Epley (Salem), 3-2; 3rd: Stephen Kemp (LV) dec. Kiel Price (Canton), 5-3; 5th: Ryan Brown (CC) p. Brent Cetnar (LS), 3:29.
160: Ziad Kharbush (LS) dec. Scott Brown (WJG), 4-2; 3rd: Wassim El Awadi (Bell.) p. Nate Turco (LF), 3:47; 5th: Isaac Barris (RU) dec. Stefan Gatt (CC), 14-12.
177: Jeff Elswick (WM) dec. Andrew Hein (WJG), 3-1; 3rd: Dan Woodall (LF) p. J.J. Vandenbosche (LS), 9-8.
189: Joe Kinville (CC) p. Vince Daroff (Ply.), 1:16; 3rd: Matt Greenman (LS) dec. Marc Kadrich (LF), 6-5; 5th: Joey Kowtko (WJG) won by injury default over Mike Schatz (LV).
215: Shamir Garcia (WJG) dec. Robert Coffey (WM), 6-4; 3rd: Vince Benavides (LF) dec. Paul Rockrohr (LV), 5-2; 5th: Jim Morasso (CC) p. Jim McCarthy (LS), 1:35.
285: Kyle Brown (LV) p. Donnie Laramie (Canton), 3:18; 3rd: Mike Martin (CC) p. Jacob Sweeney (Bell.), 0:30; 5th: Mark Parrish (LC) dec. Frank Toarmina (WJG), 8-3.

Livonia Red vaults to title; Blue takes second

Livonia gymnasts made quite a statement during Saturday's 13-team Troy Athens Invitational. Livonia Red scored 143.975 points to capture the team title, edging Livonia Blue and Canton, with 143.725 each, for first place. Troy Athens Gold placed fourth with 143.175, while Rochester Adams garnered fifth with 139.825. "I was thrilled and really, really happy that the girls are going so well," Livonia Red coach Kelly Grodzicki said. "We want to keep the spirit going and refrain from injury." Livonia Red's Paula Guzik and Andrea



Guzik
Pisani
Pisani finished one-two in the Division I all-around with scores of 37.85 and 37.475, respectively. Emily Quint of Livonia Blue

placed third with a total of 37.025. Guzik finished first on the uneven bars (9.45) and tied Quint for first on floor exercise (9.7 each). Guzik also added a third on balance beam (9.5) and tied for fourth on vault (9.2). Pisani was runner-up on beam (9.525); third on bars (9.15) and floor (9.65); and tied for seventh on vault (9.15). In addition for tying for first on floor, Quint took seconds on vault (9.4) and bars (9.25). She also added a 10th on beam (8.765). Livonia Blue's Meghan Powers earned fifth overall in the Division I all-around (36.8), highlighted by fourth on beam

(9.4); a tie for sixth on bars (9.0); eighth on floor (9.45); and 10th on vault (8.95). In Division II, Livonia Blue's Laura Nomura was runner-up (35.7), including a third on floor (9.4); a tie for third on vault (9.05); fourth on beam (8.8); and seventh on bars (8.45). Livonia Red's Alyssa Gonzales took seventh in the Division II all-around (33.7), with her best finish on beam (8.75). Also in Division II, Kelly Tapella (Livonia Blue) added a third on bars with a score of 9.05, while Margarita Lazarevska (Livonia Red) placed seventh on floor (9.15). Mandi Boulier (Livonia Red) tied for 10th on bars (8.3).

Smith cops a winning formula in



Coach Fred Miller (left) and his longtime assistant Sonny Micallef have been fixtures in the Falcons Unit varsity football program in Livonia.

BY BRAD EMONS
STAFF WRITER

Tony Dungy and Lovie Smith would be envious of Fred Miller.

That's because the Livonia Falcons varsity coach knows a thing or two about winning Super Bowls ... in the Western Lakes Junior Football League.

Smith has been coaching junior league football for the past 35 years, starting in 1972 with the Falcons as an assistant coach under Bill Rice before taking over as the varsity head coach in 1973.

And Smith has put together quite an impressive resume in 275 games, going 214-50-11, including 30 winning seasons (11 undefeated), and winning two of the first three Super Bowls in the newly formed WLJFL.

Yet, Smith doesn't look at his worth in terms of

wins or losses.

"We just try to play basic football," said Smith, who played high school football at Redford Union. "We'll run the slot-I (formation), but I might change up. I teach fundamentals, try to build a foundation and hope they grow and learn. I like to put game plans together, see how they progress. We don't win all the time, but we win our fair share. My thing is to always play hard and do your best."

The thought of coaching another season never gets old for the 55-year-old Smith, who works inside for the Detroit Police Department's Violent Crimes Task Force Unit.

When August rolls around and conditioning starts, Smith begins to mold a team of varsity players who range in age from 12-14 and weigh anywhere up to 170 pounds.

"I just said that when it stops being fun ..."

Smith said. "That's when I'll step back. It's just really rewarding and humbling. It's just a joy to watch the boys and seeing what I can do. It's been tremendous."

Smith can't stop now anyway.

That's because his son Matthew, 12, who has played two seasons each at the freshman and JV levels, becomes eligible to play for his dad at varsity level.

And Smith embraces the idea of coaching his own son. He has no reservations.

"I'm looking forward to it," he said.

He's even convinced his wife, Beth, once a non-football fan, to take an interest.

"She loves it, she's very supportive," he said. "Even though it takes a lot of time away, she understands."

Smith has developed many surrogate father-son relationships over the years.

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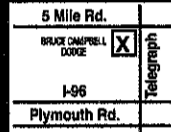
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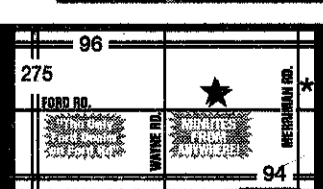
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"Having my own son (Nicholas) play for this man the past two seasons and watching him turn my son from a little boy to a young man made me realize what a truly remarkable man Fred is," said Michael Rotter, Falcon Unit Director and Football Commissioner for the Livonia Junior Athletic League. "He demands only that the players give their all and leave nothing on the field."

"What is totally amazing is that the LJAL is a first-come sign-up, and not a tryout team. And yet he has recorded that many victories. That alone tells you what kind of coach he is."

Sonny Micallef, Smith's assistant the past 17 seasons, started as a field director in the LJFL in 1981 and sent two of his sons, Ryan and Randy (now the offensive coordinator at Walled Lake Central High), through the Falcon program.

Both played under Smith.

"He cares about kids so much, and as far as teaching the game, he's wonderful at it," said Micallef, a retiree from Ford Motor Co. who spends his winters as a "snowbird" in Venice, Fla. "I've been around him for 25 years and the kids have so much respect for him. I can't explain it. He's just great. His leadership keeps everything going."

Micallef and Smith are also adept at playing the role of good cop, bad cop. They've got the routine down pat.

"I'm very emotional, a holler guy, rah-rah," Smith admits. "I'll read them the riot act when I have to, but I'll also praise them. You can only beat them down so much or you'll lose them. Sonny is the guy who smoothes things over. We have a very good working relationship."

Adds Micallef: I'm the one they come to after ...

I'm 'Father Sonny' Fred will never take you down too far. He'll build you back up and give you praise. He's also got real sense of humor to coach as long as he has."

Despite the impressive record, Micallef said Smith has it all in perspective.

"If you don't succeed, it's not the end of the world and that's why he's been successful," Micallef said. "He wants his kids to put out the extra effort, but he's never preached winning, and the kids respect and understand that."

Smith also keeps tabs on his former players. Many have excelled at the collegiate and high school level.

Among Smith's former standouts from Stevenson High include David Hall, a former Michigan quarterback who played tight end and defensive end for the Falcons, along with his brother Jeff, and Jim

Spala (Wayne State).

Smith also coached brothers Mike and Jeff Gatt, who later went on to play at Redford Catholic Central High and Hillsdale College.

Smith said he'll probably view Sunday's Super Bowl in Miami from his own home.

When asked who he was rooting for, Smith didn't hesitate.

"Dungy's from Michigan, I'd like to see him win, said the Falcons coach.

Coaches come and go in the NFL, but Smith appears to be on his way to a Joe Paterno-like tenure in the WLJFL.

"They'll have to carry him off the field," Micallef said. "He just loves teaching the game all these years."

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