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Ambulance rate dispute probed

By Craig Plechura
staff writer

Joseph Cody figures \$237.50 is a lot to pay an ambulance company for transportation and paramedic attention when it turns out all his wife, Rolande, suffered was a severe nosebleed. "When I opened the bill I thought I'd have a heart attack and would have to call an ambulance — another one," Cody said.

As a resident of the Chatham Hills apartment complex in Farmington, Cody took his rate complaint to city hall and to the Farmington Observer. Farmington City Manager Robert Deadman is currently conducting a study of area ambulance rates prompted by city council concerns about rate complaints by citizens in neighboring Novi.

Deadman said the rate study isn't complete because he wants to make sure comparable ambulance equipment and paramedic services are being compared along with the rates charged.

However, Deadman would say the bill Cody received appears to be consistent with charges billed to other emergency users of Novi Ambulance.

A telephone call to Joyce Miller, who is in charge of billing at Am-Care, Inc. which serves residents of Farmington

Hills, revealed that a night-time emergency call of the type Cody describes would have cost \$202.50 at Am-Care, or \$35 less than the amount Novi Ambulance charged.

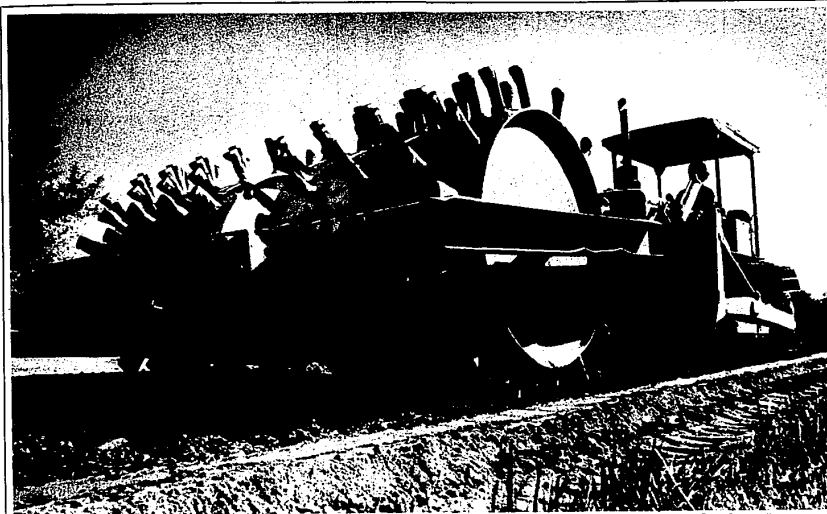
John Early, owner of Novi Ambulance, admits advance life support ambulance runs by his company cost more than ambulance runs handled by competitors such as Am-Care. But Early said he challenges any competitor to match Novi Ambulance's response time in emergencies or compare their medical equipment and personnel to Early's.

COMPETITORS looking for a larger share of emergency runs in Farmington and Novi, Early maintains, are behind a recent spate of newspaper articles quoting citizens complaining about high Novi Ambulance rates.

Early doesn't have an exclusive contract to serve the residents of Novi or Farmington in the event of an emergency. However, for the past eight years, public safety officials in Farmington have made it a practice to call Novi Ambulance when a citizen calls for aid in a medical emergency.

Early said he's grown weary answering "false allegations" to the effect

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Rollin' on the road

A sheep's foot roller rumbles along Lyman, west of Drake, as part of a process that provides paved roads at half the cost of more conven-

tional methods. For the story and more pictures, please turn to Page 3A.

Fancy Borzini/staff photographer

She showed them by winning writing award at U-M

By Mary Rodriquez
staff writer

A desire to prove to English professors at the University of Michigan that she could write led a Farmington woman into composing an essay that earned her U-M's most prestigious writing award.

Susan Watson took a second place Hopwood Award last week for her essay, "Anthony and Cassandra," a story about a friend and his cat.

Previous winners in the 50-year history of the awards named for Avery and Jule Hopwood include playwright Arthur Miller, poet John Ciardi, and

scriptwriter David Newman, who contributed to screenplays for Superman I and II.

Ms. Watson, 24, a junior majoring in film and video, won the award for an essay she wrote this summer for her very first class as a U-M student, freshman composition.

As a new student transferring from Oakland Community College, she was required to take a composition writing exam and was assigned the topic of gun control.

Sitting in an auditorium with hundreds of other students, Ms. Watson felt she couldn't compose a sound paper on that subject.

"It's a political issue," she said. "I couldn't present a good argument on the subject without information to back me up."

She asked for an alternative topic, but the English department wouldn't budge. Short of taking the matter before an academic board, she opted for the freshman class.

"I PROTESTED HAVING to take the course," she said. "Part of the reason I entered the contest was to show them that I could write."

She credits three professors at the OCC, Orchard Ridge campus in Farmington Hills with shaping her educa-

tion: Dr. James Vendettuoli, world religion; Dr. Dan Greenberg, film; and William Alexander, English.

"I really remembered what I learned in their classes," she said.

The winning essay tells the story of a bachelor friend who grudgingly adopts a pregnant cat to curb the mouse problem in his farmhouse. Based on a true story, Ms. Watson changed the names to the classical sounding Anthony and Cassandra.

At Stevenson High School in Livonia, she enjoyed art and English electives. At OCC, she earned a degree in audio/visual technology in 1977.

After a brief marriage and a year

and a half working in the retail business, she returned to OCC for a variety of courses until she decided to complete work for a bachelor's degree at U-M.

"I don't have a particular career in mind — possibly film editing," she said.

"I'd like to sell photography, too." She has a darkroom in her downtown Farmington apartment, which is also stocked with several bookcases of literature from Mark Twain to James Thurber.

HER PHOTOGRAPHS favor detail work of such things as rows of caricature-face tobacco pouches on a shelf in St. Augustine, Fla. Her portfolio also has a mixture of closeup nature shots and classical architecture.

She most admires Leonardo da Vinci, "because he was talented in so many fields." Her favorite authors are Thurber, Somerset Maugham and Tennessee Williams.

She plans to buy a bust of an author with the \$75 check she won with the Hopwood.



Susan Watson proves her point

Ms. Watson is unsure at this point if she'll enter other writing contests.

"After you win on your first try, you hate to push your luck," she said. "But I probably will."

Small car buffs are rallying fast

By Gary M. Cates
staff writer

Pro rallying is a fast-growing motor sport, says John Thompson, co-sponsor of an upcoming car rally.

The traditional oval track won't satisfy the professional rally racer. These drivers prefer to take on the countryside, the public streets and the forest.

Ralliers will race in the snow, rain, mud, sand, cement, night and day. And to top it off, they have no idea where they're going when they race.

"With big engines beginning to disappear, the future of small-car competition is brighter than ever," said Thompson, president of Thompson Advertising Productions in Farmington Hills.

"The big engines are no longer available, and people don't want to give up doing something exciting with their cars," he said. "Rallying calls for total performance."

Pro rallying requires a car to have precise suspension, some amount of horsepower and expert handling, Thompson said.

American rallying places more emphasis on speed than the international rallying circuit.

Pro rallying as a motor sport is a recent invention. Pioneered in Europe 20 years ago, the sport has grown astoundingly popular overseas.

The Sports Car Club of America, the nation's foremost rally-sanctioning body, has nearly 1,000 specially-licensed rally drivers.

Racing on public roads, backwoods ruts or mud-covered fields, the rallies are scored on the ability of the driver/navigator team to arrive at an unknown control point.

The cars leave singly from a starting point, dashing off with a set of directions to a point two to 20

miles away.

"The directions are given to the co-driver, and are usually rather tricky. They might say turn left at the first S in the road," said Thompson.

"It's (rallying) exciting as hell, if you like that kind of thing," he said.

Rallying is sort of subdued now, but is going to get bigger and bigger, Thompson said. A lot of people enjoy cars for more than transportation, he said.

"Pro rallying has a dozen events around the country," Thompson said. The rallies differ in length and duration. Some rallies go several days, with nighttime racing. One of the renowned rallies is Michigan's Press On Regardless (POR). The POR is considered by many to be the toughest rally on the international circuit.

With the added emphasis on speed in America, Thompson said rallying has turned into a really fast sport.

"The high-performance market is going through changes. Brute power is no longer the appeal. People are becoming interested in handling," Thompson said.

"Drag racing is slowing. Drag racing will change to only the highest level of professionals."

Professional rally cars are required to race without extensive modifications. Most rally cars are similar to the showroom models, except for safety modifications and additional lighting for nighttime racing.

Although rally cars can't have modified engines or drive trains, owners spend a good deal of money on the cars.

"Companies spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to prepare cars for these events," Thompson said. Thompson's car, a Dodge Omni 024, has a total cost of \$15,000 and is expected to be ready this September. It is being built in California.



Domestic front-wheel drive cars such as the Dodge Colt rounding the bend are starting to show up in pro rally races, explains John Thompson of Farmington Hills.

The \$15,000 cost included the price of a stock 4-speed Dodge Omni 024, blueprinted the engine (to make sure it is built to the manufacturer's specifications), tires, oil, a spare engine, and spare parts costs. The expense of trucking the car to events and payment for the drivers is not included.

The money that can be earned in race winnings will not meet the expenses of sponsoring a car, Thompson said.

"You're in it because you love the sport," he said. "Plus you always have the risk that the car might flip

or could be damaged."

The only drawback to rallying is the lack of facilities for spectators, he said.

"Rallying happens over a long route and because of that it doesn't have the facilities for spectators," Thompson said. "I could see closed-circuit rallying in 30-40-mile links so spectators could watch."

Thompson said companies would start sponsoring rallying if there were more spectators at the events. "We've been in racing for a long time. It's still a field of our (Thompson Advertising) expertise," he said.

Die sinkers still on strike

By Craig Plechura
staff writer

Forty-two tool and die union members at two separate Farmington plants on Eight Mile Road are striking against their employer, John Kchikian of Southfield.

Non-union die sinkers at a third plant owned by Kchikian in the city are still on the job.

As members of the International Die Sinkers Conference, the striking employees walked off their jobs on July 24, more than three weeks after their

three-year contract expired nationally at midnight on June 30.

Workers said attempts to negotiate a settlement past the deadline broke down when Kchikian attempted to play one plant against another and postponed bargaining sessions with union representatives until September.

Kchikian said he was, and still is, ready to negotiate, but the process "takes time."

Workers walked out first at Imperial Forge-Die Corp., 32840 Eight Mile Rd.,

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