

Women air feelings on life's changes, 1B



2nd season starts, 1D

Hills looks back at 1986 fire calls, 16A

Farmington Observer

Volume 98 Number 45

Thursday, March 12, 1987

Farmington, Michigan

80 Pages

Twenty-Five Cents

Farmington FOCUS

If you have a news item or an idea for a feature story or an action picture with a Farmington-area connection, send a note to our downtown office at 32303 Grand River, Farmington 48024.

AFTER 1 1/2 years of construction and missed completion dates, the Farmington Hills Police Facility is now open and ready for business. Farmington Hills Police Department employees were organizing their new work stations in the 36,000-square-foot, \$3.2-million building Monday morning. The building stands just west of the Farmington Hills City Hall, at 11 Mile and Orchard Lake roads. A dedication and open house is planned for mid-May, Chief William Dwyer said.

REVIEWING funeral processions. At Councilman Richard Tupper's request, the Farmington Department of Public Safety will review traffic accidents and near misses — caused by lengthy funeral processions. For safety's sake, Tupper would like to see local funeral directors encourage smaller processions. Public safety director Frank Laubhoff said several legislative attempts by the state to regulate the size of funeral processions have failed.

LIGHTING preview. Manufacturer's representatives are in town this week to show members of Farmington's Downtown Development Authority the new pedestrian lighting fixture to be installed in the city's central business district. DDA board members are expected to eye the height of the "bishop's crook" lampposts and Victorian-style lighting globes before preparing for installation this spring and summer.

BATTER up. The South Farmington Baseball League is planning its annual parade to kick off the baseball season at 10 a.m. Saturday, May 9. The parade will proceed from the city hall to the city park, where a ceremony beginning the 1987 season will be held.

EGG-CITEMENT! The Farmington Area Jaycees annual Easter Egg Hunt will begin at 10 a.m. Saturday, April 4, at Shawassee Park, Farmington. The rain date is scheduled for April 11.

KEEP these numbers handy for reference when calling the Farmington Observer: news line, 477-5450; sports line, 591-2312; home delivery, 591-0500; classified ads, 591-0900; display ads, 591-2300.

FOOTNOTES: One year ago this week — Harry Wingeter's hooked on downtown. "Like babies, we're learning to walk. But things will begin to happen now that we have an organization with some meat to it," says Wingeter, president of Farmington's newly formed Downtown Development Authority and a charter member in the 25-year-old Downtown Farmington Center.

Murder case headed to retrial

He serves 20 years

Is case precedent-setting: 14A.

By Joanne Maliszewski staff writer

'This is the type of constitutional error that if it amounted to a technicality, a new trial would not have been granted.'

— Frank Lawrence John Merlo's attorney

After 20 years in prison, a Farmington Hills man convicted of murdering his wife — has been granted a new trial. After running the gamut of appeal routes, Oakland County prosecutors must retry John Merlo, 45. He was convicted of first-degree murder in the 1967 shooting death of his 18-year-old estranged



John Merlo

wife, Sharon, as she was working in a beauty shop on Eight Mile in what was then Farmington Township. "On Friday, we got word that as of March 2, the U.S. Supreme Court denied our application to have the case heard. That means we have run out of appellate avenues," said Oakland County assistant prosecutor Gary Chopp, who has been assigned the case. The trial must commence within 90 days as of March 2. Chopp and Merlo's attorney, Frank Lawrence of Birmingham, are expected to meet with Oakland Circuit Judge Fred Mester Friday to schedule the

trial, Chopp said. Farmington Hills Capt. Russell Conway, the detective who originally investigated the murder, is preparing for the new trial. Conway said he didn't really know what result to expect from the lengthy appeals process. But he's prepared. "I didn't really know. That decision lays with the court. My reaction is whatever the courts want, that's what we do." **MERLO WON** his new trial by arguing that the judge at his first trial gave the jury bad instructions that resulted in the jury convicting him — without a choice of second-degree

or manslaughter — of first-degree murder, which carries a mandatory life sentence.

In 1979, however, a ruling was handed down that said the type of instruction given by the judge in Merlo's 1987 trial was wrong. Despite the ruling, county prosecutors maintain that the jury instruction was "a harmless error" that had no effect on Merlo's conviction.

"By standards nowadays, it was wrong. But it was harmless error," Chopp said. "That one little instruction . . . it certainly didn't cause him to be convicted."

Margaret Horenstein, appellate attorney for the county prosecutor's office, agreed.

Please turn to Page 14

'You guys saved the baby's life'



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Firefighters Wally Kurzaja, Keith Lampear and Ron Battani, with Michael and Carol Brazen and their newborn son, Christopher Michael, at Botsford General Hospital.

When the stork called, they delivered

By Casey Hans staff writer

Little Christopher Michael Brazen decided Saturday morning it was time to pay the world a visit. The 5-pound, 7-ounce baby was born to Carol Brazen nearly three weeks early — at home.

Doctors at Botsford General Hospital, where the baby and his mother were taken after delivery, told Carol and Michael Brazen their first-born may not have survived without emergency medical help.

Three Farmington Hills firefighters — Wally Kurzaja, Keith Lampear and Ron Battani — ar-

rived on the scene to deliver the baby just after 6 a.m. It was an event that made everyone's weekend special.

"You guys saved the baby's life — I don't know what to say," Carol told the firefighters Tuesday as she and Michael prepared to leave the hospital for their Farmington Hills home.

"I was just shocked and panicked until somebody came by and knew what they were doing.

"It wasn't for them, this guy wouldn't be alive," Michael added, holding the tiny bundle of life. "I thought we were having death in-

stead of life."

FIREFIGHTERS AT Farmington Hills Station 3, near Grand River and Middlebelt, received an emergency call from the Brazen house on Dresden, which they presumed was a routine medical run.

When the emergency trio arrived, they realized the gravity of the situation and took immediate action. Kurzaja was the delivering attendant with the help of Lampear and Battani. Both mother and baby were in distress and the situation had to be handled at the scene.

The birth occurred within 15 minutes of the time firefighters

received the original call, Lapean said.

The firefighters initially made contact with the hospital, according to Lampear, "and the next thing I know, Ron came out to the truck and said she was having the baby."

This was not a first-time delivery for the firefighters, but the first for all of them in a home setting. After the delivery, Lampear said he "went home and told my wife and she didn't believe me."

The men said their station's medical unit will probably carry a blue stork on its side in the near future because of the recent miracle.

Schools' borders could be redrawn

By Casey Hans staff writer

Farmington school officials are expected to discuss high school redistricting on Tuesday, following several months of research by a boundary study committee.

Under recommendations, students living east of Orchard Lake Road in portions of Farmington Hills and West Bloomfield Township, who would previously have attended North Farmington High School, would go to Harrison High School. Students already attending North — or who have siblings attending North — could continue attending North there.

Such recommendations would come on the heels of controversial elementary boundary changes approved by the school board in 1986.

Trustees will hear the committee's report at a board study session scheduled to begin at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 17, at East Middle School, according to assistant superintendent Lynn Nutter, who chairs the committee. No board vote is planned.

Nutter declined to elaborate on the committee's plans, saying: "I think it would be premature at this point."

Please turn to Page 12

what's inside

Around Farmington	5B
Business	1-3C
Cable connection	10A
Club circuit	2B
Crossword puzzle	13E
Entertainment	4-7C
Obituaries	6D
Opinion	18A
Police/fire calls	17A
Readers' forum	19A
Sports	1-5D
Travel	7D
Classifieds/Sections C,E,F	
Index	11C
Auto	20C
Real estate	2E
Employment	11C

Council watcher eyes council seat

By Joanne Maliszewski staff writer

After 25 years of watching and putting in his two-cents' worth, Democratic activist Aldo Vagnozzi is throwing his hat into the political ring.

Vagnozzi, 61, has announced his intention to seek election to the

Farmington Hills City Council — the body he has faithfully watched for years.

"After 25 years of watching, I'd rather be doing," said Vagnozzi, a 27-year Farmington Hills resident. "I thought that while being a council watcher has its rewards, I wish I had been part of the decision-making process."

Vagnozzi is the first to announce his candidacy for what will be four open seats on the Farmington Hills City Council. The four-year terms of council members Don Wolf, Joe Alkateeb and Joan Dudley will expire this year. Councilman Terry Sever's two-year also will expire.

None of the incumbents has yet announced intentions to run in the November city election. A two-year Farmington Community Library trustee, Vagnozzi — according to city policy — will be re-



Aldo Vagnozzi 27-year Hills resident

Please turn to Page 12

Broader host law being considered

By Joanne Maliszewski staff writer

Some parents in Farmington Hills apparently have been renting rooms at area hotels/motels, then turning around and handing the keys to their teenagers who use the rooms for parties.

Some teens just rent the rooms themselves and host a party that continues until complaining guests call the manager.

The majority of the teen parties reportedly involve alcohol and drugs, said Betty Nicolay, past

Please turn to Page 12

You deserve the best

CREATIVE LIVING REAL ESTATE GUIDE

IN EVERY THURSDAY EDITION