

What's hip, almost hip and bhip ID



North wins No. 11, 1C

Outdoor classes are family-oriented 3A

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THE kickoff meeting for Farmington Hills' Year 2000 Plan participants Jan. 21 drew high praise from councilwoman Jean Fox. "It was one of the most inspirational days that we have had here for the city in a long, long time," she said at the city council meeting two days later. Participants are charged with developing a plan for the 1990s to achieve the quality of life that residents desire. The kickoff meeting included a speech by futurist Edward Barlow Jr., a video presentation and subcommittee meetings. Fox said enthusiasm was "very, very high" among the 200 people who attended. "It was a first-class day all the way through." Former county commissioner Jack McDonald chairs the 15-member steering committee. Mayor Terry Sever sees participants embarking "on an exciting journey, one which will establish a vision for Farmington Hills up to and into the 21st century."

Memory lane

50 years ago: Suburban toll rates are being cut by order of the Michigan Public Utilities Commission so that within a few months, it will be possible to call Redford Township, Livonia Township or Southfield Township for only five cents. Who owns the Town Hall is scheduled to be decided in Oakland County Circuit Court Jan. 30. — Farmington Enterprise, Jan. 19, 1939

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Angry Alkateeb threatens to quit

By Joanne Maliszewski staff writer

Fed up with what he calls the "politics and hypocrisy" of the Farmington Hills City Council, veteran councilman Joe Alkateeb is considering resigning from his third four-year term. "I am seriously, seriously, seriously considering resigning because I am disgusted. I would be resigning as a protest of what is going on," said Alkateeb, in the first year of his third council term. The council member said he is particularly angry about a list, prepared by Mayor Terry Sever, designating board and commission members interested in reappointment whose terms expire Feb. 1. The list does not include planning commissioner Vince Valvona, whom Alkateeb appointed when he was mayor in 1986. In a story in the Observer Jan. 28, Sever said he spoke with Valvona about reappointment. "I had a conversation with Vince and we had a discussion about the city, what was best for the city, the things I wanted to do and how he fits into that," Sever said. Valvona, who preferred not to discuss details of the issue, said he sent a letter asking not to be reappointed.

ALKATEEB DENIES that Valvona wanted to leave the planning commission. Other planning commissioners who refused to be named also agree. Sever has denied he removed Valvona from the commission. A city attorney's report cleared Valvona of any conflict of interest in a rezoning matter for Carrington Place Apartments for Seniors, at Freedom and Drake, late last year. Valvona later became a financial partner in the senior apartment project. Alkateeb said it is clear from the city attorney's report on the matter — and the dates relating to the rezoning and when Valvona became a partner — that the planning commissioner had no conflict. "This system of government . . . I am having total doubts about whether it works. The interest of the city is no longer the business of council meetings. The politics, the hypocrisy and under-the-table dealings is what bothers me," said Alkateeb, who declined to elaborate. Alkateeb, the top vote-getter in the November 1987 council election, has been absent six of the 20 scheduled Monday night council meetings from July to Jan. 23. He

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— Councilman Joe Alkateeb
Farmington Hills



Trial delay incenses suspect

By Janice Brunson staff writer

Jon Vermeulen, charged more than three years ago with premeditated murder, said he is forfeiting his right to trial by jury in the shooting death of a woman he married while still legally wed to his first wife of 21 years. The Farmington Hills man also is asking Oakland County Circuit Judge Fred Mester to disqualify himself from the case because the judge, in Vermeulen's view, "has shown bias and prejudice every step of the way." "All I can do is request a bench trial before (Circuit Judge) John N. O'Brien. Mester has left me no other alternative. He's trapped me with his very self-serving ruling. I am not sitting for another year. I am not waiting. No way," said Vermeulen, 43.

A bench trial, he added, is his only hope of a speedy trial. Mester said it would be inappropriate for him to comment on Vermeulen's remarks. Vermeulen has been held in county jail without bond nearly 38 months, since his discharge from Botsford General Hospital, Farmington Hills, after the death of Urime "Renae" Lewis on Dec. 26, 1985. The 24-year-old woman was shot in the upper body with a slug from a .44 Magnum revolver that had been sent to Vermeulen while he was serving in the Army Special Forces in Vietnam. Vermeulen married Lewis six weeks before the shooting, while still married to Sharon Vermeulen, formerly of Redford Township. Sharon Vermeulen has since moved out of state.

VERMEULEN SAID he wants a bench trial because Mester dashed all hopes for a timely jury trial by rejecting a proposal between Vermeulen's attorney and the Oakland County prosecutor that would have hastened setting a trial date.

'I am not sitting for another year. I am not waiting. No way.'
— Jon Vermeulen
wants speedy trial

Trial is now set for Feb. 13. But few who are familiar with the case believe the date will be kept. At issue is marital privilege — whether testimony by Vermeulen's legal wife at the time of the shooting, Sharon, will be permitted during a trial. A divorce between the two became final in February 1988, two months after the shooting and three months after Vermeulen had married Lewis. Last week, Mester said he will not allow a proposed agreement between prosecutors and Vermeulen's defense attorney to bring the case to trial before the Michigan Supreme Court rules on the issue of marital privilege.

The high court heard oral arguments last April; a ruling is pending. "Vermeulen asserted (the marital) privilege. He has the right to a definitive answer. This is a critically important decision. I am not going to jeopardize his rights. Mr. Vermeulen will get his day in court," said Mester, who expects the high court ruling "very soon." The position angers Vermeulen: "He has sentenced me to another year in county jail without benefit of adjudication."

Vermeulen's court-appointed attorney, Larry Kalnny of Birmingham, said, "We never seen anything like this in 16 years of practice. The older this case gets, the more the injustice, the longer a speedy trial has been denied."

UNDER THE proposal, Vermeulen would waive marital privilege, thereby permitting testimony by

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The photo

Before his transfer to Otsego County Jail, Jon Vermeulen spent 23 hours a day in his Oakland County Jail cell. The picture inside the cell shows him and the woman he is accused of murdering, Urime "Renae" Lewis, at a happier time, their Las Vegas wedding on Nov. 11, 1985.

Snow ticket burns owner

By Casey Hans staff writer

A commercial property owner in downtown Farmington is upset with a ticket he received in January for not removing snow quickly enough from his sidewalk. He says he is being treated unfairly. Tom DeWard's recent comments to city council members brought to light an issue which has been discussed in detail during the past two years — the problems of snow removal. The issue has been addressed by the city's Downtown Development Authority since its inception in 1986, now the council is getting involved. DeWard had words with the city council after administrators received orders from the city council to crack down on people who do not remove snow from their sidewalks. Owner of the building that houses Zimmus Vacuum Cleaners on Grand River, DeWard received an ordinance violation when snow was not removed following a Jan. 3 storm.

Under city ordinance, residential and commercial property owners are responsible for shoveling sidewalks in front of their property. "I believe I'm being harassed and discriminated against because of other complaints" with the city, DeWard told the city council Jan. 16. "If you're going to do it for me, do it for everyone. Everyone should be treated the same."

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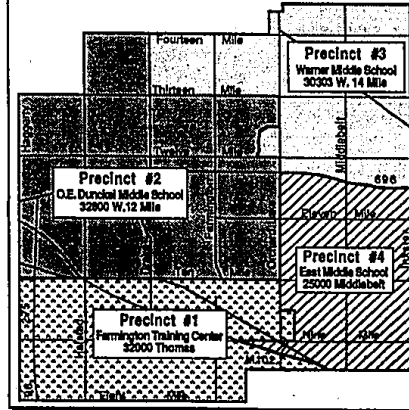
Vote is Tuesday on school

Tuesday, Jan. 31, is election day for Farmington Public Schools voters, as they decide whether to approve money to build a new elementary school on the district's west side. Voters will decide on the \$7.3 million bond issue to build a new 600-student elementary school, develop and improve the school site and equip the school's playground.

The proposed site is on the south side of 11 Mile, just east of Halsted, on a rolling, wooded, 18-acre parcel owned by the district. Polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 31. The four voting precincts are not the same as those used in city elections. Absentees

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Farmington Public Schools voting precincts



Parents challenge WL gun program

By Carolyn DeMarco staff writer

A four-day outdoor life study at the Walled Lake School District's Outdoor Recreation Center went on last week without the participation of Maple Elementary sixth-grader Bradley Holcman. Holcman was pulled from the program by his parents, Samuel and Janis Holcman of West Bloomfield after Oakland Circuit Court Judge John N. O'Brien refused two weeks ago to grant a restraining order to keep the district from using live ammunition in a gun safety class at the center.

A show cause hearing was scheduled Friday to give the school district and Holcman the opportunity to state their respective cases. The district includes part of northwest Farmington Hills.

"The school district is marvelous. We are very supportive of the district," Samuel Holcman said in a telephone interview Tuesday. "But we are upset at the lack of responsiveness in this matter. . . . I've challenged the school district to show me another school district which does this (teaches children to shoot). I've personally talked to 22 districts. Not one does this. We may be progressive or we may be the last to wake up. I'm not sure."

ABOUT 400 sixth-graders in Walled Lake's 11 elementary schools annually take turns participating in the four-day, three-night stay at the 11-acre Outdoor Education Center, on Sleeth Road in Commerce Township, according to school district publicist Lois Lange. The program

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