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# Farmington Observer

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## farmington FOCUS

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**M**OVING on. Vince Wade, 42, has left Channel 7's Action News after 17 years to become senior reporter/investigator for Channel 2's Eyewitness News.

Armed with a three-year contract, the Farmington Hills resident started work at WJBK-TV Monday.

Wade had been working there without a contract for 2 1/2 years. He was the first TV newsmen to report the disappearance of Teamsters boss Jimmy Hoffa.

**BACK** on board. Donald Munter was reappointed to Farmington's historical commission. James Lanigan was reappointed to the Farmington Community Library Board, representing Farmington.

**WHAT'S** the most popular dog and cat name in the Farmington area? Max, says Dr. John Richardson, a Farmington veterinarian, who recently computerized office records. Other popular names are Brandy, Tiger, Sam, Ginger, Pepper, Dusty, Smokey, Buddy and Bandit.

### QUOTE of the week

"The manager was standing there . . . smiling. I don't know what possessed me but I asked him, 'How would you like to be a good Samaritan?'"

— Jude Klein, who received a discount from a local Kmart on items bought for a Highland Park family whose home burned (see story this page).

## Court: Spouse can't testify in murder case

### Trial set to start Tuesday

Split vote upholds marital privilege, 11A

By Janice Brunson staff writer

**A**FTER 39 months of waiting, a Farmington Hills man accused of murdering his second wife is expected to go to trial Tuesday. The Michigan Supreme Court this week ruled his legal wife at the time of the shooting, who was his first wife, cannot testify against him.

A decorated Vietnam veteran, Jon Vermeulen, 43, has been held without bond in the Oakland County Jail on charges of first-degree murder and felony firearms possession in the shooting death of Urime "Renee" Lewis, 24.

Approximately six weeks pregnant, she was shot to death Dec. 26, 1985, in the couple's two-bedroom unit at Mulwood Apartments, Grand River and Drake.

"The statute (protecting marital privilege) clearly and unequivocally provides that a spouse may not during the marriage or afterwards be examined as to any communication made during the marriage," the high court said in its 4-3 majority opinion, handed down Tuesday.

Lewis, a naturalized citizen from Yugoslavia, was Vermeulen's second wife whom he had bigamously wed six weeks earlier in Las Vegas.

Testimony of Sharon Vermeulen, his first wife, is based on a conversation with her husband a week before the shooting, in which he

'They followed my argument. The privilege applies.'

— John Lazar Farmington Hills appellate attorney

threatened to kill Lewis if she ever left him, according to Oakland County Circuit Court records. Vermeulen contends he told Sharon, who now lives out of state, he'd kill himself if Lewis ever left him.

"THEY FOLLOWED my argument. The privilege applies," said Farmington Hills appellate attorney John Lazar, who argued the case in Vermeulen's behalf before the Supreme Court last April.

The law, which contains both spousal privilege and communication privilege, bars one spouse from testifying against the other without the consent of both or unless one spouse is the victim.

"This is what the law is. The high court agreed with me. If there is to be change, it must be changed legislatively, not judicially. Otherwise, we have judicial law-making," Lazar said.

In December 1986, Mester overturned District Judge Michael Lewis' ruling disallowing Sharon's testimony the previous May in 47th District Court, Farmington.

Mester's decision was overturned by the Michigan Court of Appeals in August 1987. The Oakland County prosecutor asked the Supreme Court to rule on the question in November 1987.

"I disagree with the Supreme Court's ruling in this case," Mester said Wednesday. "I believe my decision was correct. But I respectfully accept their position because they are the law of the state."

Mester set a speedy trial date — March 14, five working days after



the photo/STEPHEN CANTRELL

Jon Vermeulen of Farmington Hills, in his Oakland County Jail cell last March. The picture inside the cell shows him and the woman he is accused of murdering, Urime "Renee" Lewis, at a happier time, their Las Vegas wedding on Nov. 11, 1985 — six weeks before her death.

the high court decision — because "I have made a commitment to this case and given it priority status." He had refused to set a trial date until the Supreme Court ruled.

"I'LL BE there. We're ready to go. Everybody wants this resolved as soon as possible" assistant Oakland County prosecutor John Stevin said Wednesday.

The high court ruling concerns intent, according to Stevin.

"Intent is the issue, and that's why we battled to get (Sharon's testimony) introduced."

"This one piece of information has been altered, our bringing it in.

There is some evidence we were going to introduce that we can't now. But the ruling will not change our (prosecution) tactics," he said.

Lawrence Kaluzny, Vermeulen's court-appointed attorney, said his client is "much better off" with the high court ruling.

"He's better off not having to explain to a jury certain things he is supposed to have said to Sharon. In other things, her testimony could help us," said Kaluzny, of Birmingham.

In February, neither Kaluzny nor Vermeulen opposed Sharon's

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## Hills' stance on road backed

By Janice Brunson staff writer

West Bloomfield trustees joined members of the Farmington Hills City Council March 2 in supporting construction of a major highway west of Haggerty Road for easing traffic onto I-96 and I-275.

The highway, planned between 12 Mile and Pontiac Trail through Novi and Commerce Township, is one of four plans proposed by the Michigan Department of Transportation to relieve increasing traffic congestion in the area, according to department representative Michael Flajole.

Trustee action came during a joint meeting of the greater West Bloomfield Master Planning committee that included trustees, the township planning board and the Farmington Hills council. Also invited were Commerce Township officials who were not present. The meeting was not publicized in Farmington Hills, the Observer learned about it through its sister paper, the West Bloomfield Eclectic.

Farmington Hills city manager William Costick encouraged township support of the plan. The Farmington Hills council officially supported it earlier. "It is in the best interest of everyone to get behind and support a single plan," Costick said.

Trustee Dennis Vatsis made clear his support of the plan by denouncing the proposal to widen Haggerty Road to eight lanes.

"THERE'S A slow-growth movement here. We'll fight projects like widening Haggerty to eight lanes," he said. Vatsis joined the unanimous vote to support construction of the new highway that, if and when completed in the early 1990s, is expected to have a capacity of 75,000 vehicles. Some 25,000 vehicles now use Haggerty Road.

James Barabasso of the Oakland County Road Commission also addressed the group. Within the next 10 years, \$120 million in additional revenue will be needed to maintain

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## Major crime in city drops; calls, arrests on the rise

By Casey Hans staff writer

Major crime decreased overall in the city of Farmington during the past year, with robberies dropping nearly in half and burglaries down 24 percent.

Comparably, the numbers of people arrested during the same period increased because of higher officer activity, according to the Farmington Public Safety Department's annual report, released Monday.

"This is the lowest in 10 years for Part I (major) crimes," said public safety director Frank Lauboff, citing a 5 percent decrease. "Nationally, you'll see a 25-30 percent increase. It certainly shows crime is not increasing in the community. It's stable."

Compared with 542 adults arrested by Farmington officers in 1979, 1,214 arrests were made during 1988, which Lauboff attributes to better monitoring and increased officer activity on the street. Since 1986, nearly 1,000 adults, or more, have

been arrested each year.

OF THE major crimes, there were increases in three areas: two rapes occurred, compared with one in 1987; two arson fires were investigated, compared with none in 1987; and there was a 14 percent rise in auto thefts from 29 to 33 cases.

Decreasing, or showing no change from the previous year, were the categories of:

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## Farmington crime statistics

Crime	1987	1988	%
Murder	0	0	-
Rape	1	2	-
Robbery	7	4	-42%
Aggravated assault	9	9	-
Burglary	91	69	-24%
Larceny	382	363	-5%
Motor vehicle theft	29	33	+13.8%
Arson	0	2	-
Total	519	493	-5%

Source: Farmington Department of Public Safety

## Store, teachers aid victims of fire

By Joanne Maliszewski staff writer

Farmington Hills resident Jude Klein took a chance when she saw his smile.

"The manager was standing there. He was smiling. I don't know what possessed me but I asked him, 'How would you like to be a good Samaritan?'" Klein said.

Farmington Hills K mart manager Mark Harris has no second thoughts or equivocation. He gave Klein and fellow adult education teacher Caroline Cooper a discount on merchandise they bought Wednesday, March 1, to help a student and her family whose Highland Park

home burned the day before.

"The store had just opened and we greet everyone as they come in. She just asked me and I said, 'Sure.' It just kind of hit me. I didn't do it for publicity or anything. If I can help somebody, I will. I wish there was more I could do," said Harris, manager at the Orchard Lake Road store for three years.

The two Highland Park adult education teachers bought sweatshirts, shoes, socks, toothbrushes, personal items and food from K mart for their student, Willi Mae Yelder, and her family, who lost everything in the early morning fire.

"We're almost family here. They (students) really care about each

other. Students were bringing in food," said Cooper, a Southfield resident.

TEACHERS AND principal William Golden at Bright Center in Highland Park collected two large bags of clothing for the family. "She lost everything in the fire. We went to our respective houses to get clothes to give her," Klein said.

On her way to work last Thursday, Cooper heard the news and knew it was the home of her student. "This is such a lovely woman. She was in shock. She was literally standing there in her nightgown and socks," she said.

Yelder is the mother of nine chil-

dren, three of whom were in the house when fire lit caught fire.

Yelder's house burned Feb. 28 when a nearby vacant house caught fire, spreading to and gutting hers and another house. Highland Park fire officials said the vacant house, raided for drugs in January, was doused with gasoline.

As a policy, the Troy-based K mart Corp. donates regularly to various charities. Each manager is provided a budget to provide discounts and donations for worthy causes.

"This was needy and this was unexpected. I try to keep things as close as I can to the most needy," said Harris, a Livonia resident.

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Monday & Thursday

**RANDY BORTZ** staff photographer

Mark Harris, manager of the Orchard Lake K mart in Farmington Hills, offered two Highland Park adult education teachers a discount on merchandise they bought to help one of their students who lost everything in a fire last week.