

When in doubt, turn to Barbara Schiff, 5B



Observer results, 1B

Multi-ethnic chorale spurs togetherness, 3A



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Pet dog revived after fire

By Susan Steinnmueller staff writer

A 2½-year-old golden retriever, found unconscious after inhaling smoke inside a burning house, was recovering Saturday afternoon after Farmington Hills firefighters saved the dog's life.

The fire started in the kitchen, near the stove, sometime between 8:45 and 10 a.m., fire investigator Al Ellis said.

The cause of the fire, on the 36000 block of Johnston in the Grand River-Drake Road area, continues to be investigated.

Fire loss to the structure and contents was estimated at \$100,000. Structural damage was heaviest in the kitchen, firefighters said.

"Any time a house fills up with smoke, you are going to have major damage because everything absorbs the smoke smell and just about everything will have to be repainted," Ellis said.

FIREFIGHTERS USED oxygen to revive the dog at the scene. After treatment at Plaza Veterinary Hospital in Farmington, the dog returned home the same day.

"I was surprised," said Bob Rebtov, Farmington Hills assistant to the fire chief, describing how he went back to the clinic to check on the dog a couple of hours after carrying him in. "The dog jumped up and got all excited when he saw me."

Ellis gave this account of the rescue:

A resident of the two-story brick house discovered smoke and flames when she returned home about 10 a.m. Saturday. No one else was home.

The resident discovered the dog, unconscious from smoke inhalation, next to a door leading to the attached garage.

After calling the fire department, a contractor helped her move the dog to the driveway and wrap it in a blanket.

That's where Rebtov found the dog unconscious. After checking that the firefighters had the fire under control, Rebtov administered a bottle of oxygen to the prone dog. He then drove it to the veterinarian.

FOR REBTOV, an animal lover, such rescues help make his job so worthwhile.

"This isn't the first time we've done that," he said. "If we have the personnel, we'll give oxygen to the dogs. The dogs, not knowing what oxygen is, will put their nose right in."

"I asked the homeowner what about her cat. The cat was OK. When they say cats have nine lives, they do," he added with a laugh.

The homeowners could not be reached for comment Saturday.

Discounts for seniors

Oakland County senior adults age 60 or older can apply for a laminated picture identification card to be used for discounts on various products.

Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency will be at two Farmington Hills locations this month to take pictures for the OLISA Senior Discount Program, which allows senior discounts on prescription drugs, eyeglasses, auto parts, rustproofing, dry cleaning, hair care, clothing, restaurants and other things.

An OLISA photographer will be at the Detroit Baptist Manor, 30245 13 Mile, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 6, and at the Mercy Senior Center, 28600 N. 11 Mile, from 10:30 a.m. to noon on Friday, Feb. 21.

Call the toll-free OLISA Human Service Network at 1-800-483-9250 for more information. Other senior sites are also being sought.



SHARON LAMIEUX/staff photographer

Mercy 'fin'ishes Ladywood

Mercy High School senior and student council president Rebecca Burdett dons a fin and makes like a marlin at Thursday's volleyball match against Ladywood of Livonia. For story please turn to Page 3B.

Schools eye plan to double number of voting precincts

By Casey Hans staff writer

Voters in Farmington school elections would get some relief from long lines and lengthy waits at the polls if a proposal to double the number of precincts is approved.

The Farmington school board voted Jan. 28 to introduce a measure which would increase the number of polling places from four to eight. If the policy change is approved, the precinct expansion could be done for the upcoming June school election, said business support services director Betsy Rothrock, who coordinates election activities for the district.

If adopted, the proposal must be approved by the state, which local officials said is usually a formality. The change would increase the cost of a school election from \$2,200 to \$10,000, said assistant superintendent for finance Bruce Barrett.

The change would help the district coordinate better with precincts in city and general elections in Farmington Hills, those precinct

boundaries are expected to be changed in coming months as political redistricting is done in Michigan, according to Hills city clerk Kathryn Dorman.

The school changes would also speed up vote tallies because the city will be able to tally many precincts by computer.

VOTERS CAST ballots in different places for school and city elections, even though the Hills does much of the tallying work for school elections.

There was a public outcry in February of 1991 when the Farmington school district held a special election asking for two operational millage increases, which were soundly defeated. But because of publicity surrounding the election, both pro and con, some 10,515 voters crowded the polls, causing waits of up to an hour and prompting some residents to leave without casting a vote.

Small turnout percentages in past school elections made the precincts at three district middle schools and Farmington Training Center workable, but Rothrock said school officials were already looking at making precinct changes because of the population increase in the Farmington area in recent years.

The current precincts serving school elections include:

- Precinct 1 - Farmington Training Center

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Hills, state cops, feds crack computer ring

By Joanne Maliszewski staff writer

In a continuous 36-hour investigation, Farmington Hills police, U.S. Secret Service and Michigan State Police cracked what is believed to be a nationwide computer fraud ring operating from Farmington Hills and involving men from Canton, Livonia and Plymouth.

Farmington Hills police briefly detained the five men, who they say agreed Thursday to cooperate with the investigation. Oakland County and federal prosecutors are reviewing the case to determine what charges will be filed against the five men — one from Farmington Hills, two from Livonia, one from Plymouth, and one from Canton, said Farmington Hills detective Sgt. Charles Nebus.

The five men were not identified pending arrest and arraignment.

"They are computer hackers," said Farmington Hills detective Patrick Monti. "They have a high level of expertise in computers."

Members of the alleged fraud ring apparently gained access to computers of credit reporting companies and used information, such as credit card numbers, credit limit, card balance, and card holder names, to order computer equipment, Monti said.

Purchases of computer equipment were billed to people who had no idea their credit card numbers and information were being used to place the orders, Monti said.

THE 36-HOUR investigation began early Wednesday, Jan. 29, with a telephone call to Farmington Hills police from a computer company with offices in Hawaii and Texas. Company officials told police they believed

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Ex-trustee raps new agenda format

By Casey Hans staff writer

A former Farmington school trustee has decried a new school board policy that changes when and how the public can speak at school board meetings.

The new policy affects school board meeting agendas, moving general public comments toward the end of the agenda and consolidating public comment on agenda items to the beginning of the meeting.

Previously, general public comment

was listed prior to the superintendent's report in the middle of the agenda, and members of the public could speak on individual agenda items as the board was considering them.

"It represents, to me, a cutback . . . in public participation and openness," said attorney Michael Shpiece, 34, a Farmington Hills resident who served on the school board from 1975 to 1983 and currently sits on an ethics committee for the city of Farmington Hills.

"It (the policy) looked much more

like a meat-axe approach. I think it is a very big step backwards. I am very disappointed," Shpiece said at the Tuesday school board meeting.

HE TOLD the board that "Unfortunately, democracy takes some time" and called the change a "dark day" in what he said had been a policy and tradition of openness. He said he applauded the role of community gadflies, and added that "I don't mind swatting them once in a while."

Shpiece had advised the board of

his concerns earlier in the month and said he would appear at the Tuesday meeting to speak about it.

Board President Jack Cotton had delayed implementing the new agenda format until trustees heard Shpiece's comments. The format was to have been implemented at the beginning of the month.

On Tuesday, the board added the Pledge of Allegiance to the meeting; the new format is expected to be implemented.

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Dealer picketed for foreign sales

By Susan Buck staff writer

Fifteen Ford Wixom plant employees, on week-long temporary layoff, took their views to Farmington Hills Friday when they picketed the Bob Saks Motor Mall.

Michael Walrod, a Brighton resident and UAW Local 38 member, said that he hopes other locals will take their lead in protesting businesses which sell foreign products, especially automobiles.

"We want to get the message out to buy American," said Walrod, a welder and Livonia Bentley High School graduate, who's worked 15 years at the Wixom plant. "Anytime we get laid off we're going to do this. If they go to one shift, I'll get laid off. Our goal is to do this until the economy picks up."



SHARON LAMIEUX/staff photographer

About 15 members of the United Auto Workers picketed the Bob Saks Motor Mall at Grand River and Drake in Farmington Hills Friday.

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