

# Alcohol suspected in 'violent' fatal car crash

BY BILL COUTANT  
STAFF WRITER

Farmington Hills police suspect that alcohol was a factor in a fatal traffic accident on Northwestern Highway Monday. One of the two cars involved was driven on a wheel rim for almost two miles before impact, police said.

The crash, at Northwestern and Middlebelt, killed Jeffrey Bernard Gragg, 50, of West Bloomfield. He was driving a Ford Taurus station wagon south on Middlebelt at about 5:40 a.m. when the car was struck by a Mercury Sable that was headed west on Northwestern.

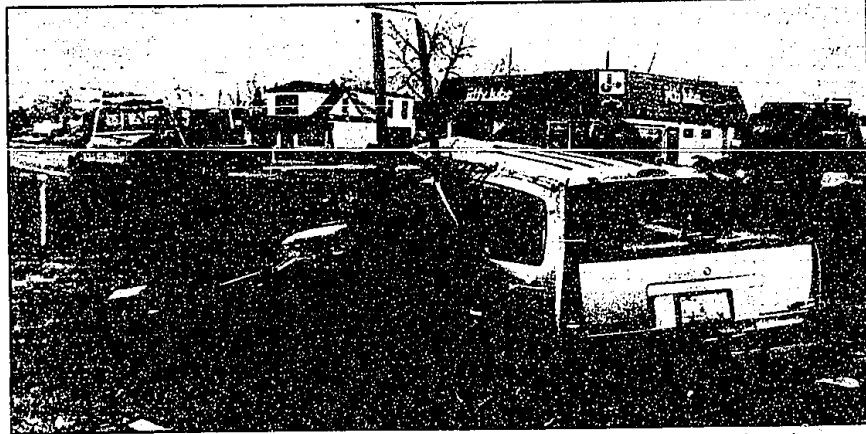
dence, but could not be revived. "It was a pretty violent collision," said Hills traffic Supervisor Sgt. Dennis Green. "And neither car had air bags."

Green said the surviving motorist was the responsible driver. Police are trying to obtain a search warrant for blood to determine if she was under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time. She could face felony negligent homicide charges, Green said.

One reason police suspect alcohol or drugs was that the Sable travelled almost two miles with no tire on the left front rim. The bare rim made its mark on the pavement and was somewhat flattened when the driver applied the brakes before impact.

Police were not able to determine if either driver was wearing a seat belt because paramedics had worked quickly to remove the victims, and damage to the drivers' compartments was severe.

Green said speeding probably was not a factor. But the speed limit, 50 mph on Northwestern, is fast enough to make an impact fatal.



Fatal crash: A West Bloomfield resident, driving the car pictured, died Monday after a smashup with another auto on Northwestern Highway in Farmington Hills.

The cars collided in the center of the intersection. The impact left Gragg's car on the southwest shoulder of the intersection. The Sable had hit, then backed on to, the north shoulder of Northwestern, on the west side.

The driver of the Sable, a resident of Grand Blanc, was taken to Botsford General Hospital in Farmington Hills, where she is listed in critical and guarded condition. Gragg was taken to Provi-

# County gives thumbs down to plan for 'free' local park

BY MARGARET O'BRIEN  
STAFF WRITER

Free was even too costly for the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission, which recently decided against applying for a state grant to buy the 30-acre Carpenter Lake property, near 10 Mile and Inkster roads.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources grant would have covered the county's portion of the \$475,000 price tag — \$355,000. Owners Oakland Community College trustee Judith Wisner and former Southfield mayor James Clarkson would have written off the rest.

Most of the six commissioners who voted against filling the application said they believed it was inappropriate to go against the wishes of Southfield officials. They had expressed opposition to a county park on the site.

"If we were sitting in a local capacity and the county wanted to come in and purchase the land

the way we're talking about doing, then we, in our local capacity, would say 'No,'" parks commissioner John Olsen said, referring to comments from Southfield administrator Robert Block.

In a Jan. 5 letter to the county, Block said the plan was not the best way to address the recreation needs in the area. "This activity would not create a positive impact on the city of Southfield," Block wrote. "It could, at best, serve very little of the true needs of some 400,000 residents who live in southern Oakland County."

Other opposing commissioners indicated that "free" might cost the county quite a bit over the long haul.

Commissioner Ruth Johnson said she was concerned about the condition of the property. She said open wells, dumping and a dilapidated dam would make it an expensive project for the county even if it can acquire the land

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Sandra Zhihar  
resident

for free. Johnson guessed, based on a recent dam project at Lake Louise, that replacing the dam on the property alone would cost \$300,000 to \$400,000. Other costs for clearing trees and putting in trails would also have to be covered by the county.

Johnson and Olsen were joined by commissioners Pecky Lewis, Jean Fox, Kay Schmid and Richard Skaritt in voting against applying for the grant. Commissioners Thomas Law, L. Brooks Patterson, George Kuhn and Richard Kuhn, Jr. voted yes.

If the commission had voted yes, it would have started a one-year application process that would have likely resulted in an approval by the Michigan DNR. Carpenter Lake would have then become only the second park in the southeast corner of the county. Red Oaks waterpark in Madison Heights is the only county park east of Middlebelt Road and south of M-59.

It would have also been the county's smallest — by far. Most of the county's 10 parks are between 500 and 1,100 acres. The smallest, Glen Oaks, is 124 acres.

Attorney Michael Schwartz, who represents Wisner and Clarkson, said he was surprised that the commission would turn down free, naturally beautiful land.

"Why would anybody in their right mind do that?" Schwartz said, adding that Wisner and Clarkson will probably refocus their efforts on marketing the land to a residential developer.

"The big losers are the citizens of Oakland County because they are now deprived of a county park," Schwartz said, attributing the loss to politics.

Wisner said earlier that Southfield's objection to the sale now, and in the past when the city passed up opportunities to purchase the land, were the result of sour political grapes.

She said the obstruction dates back to 1977 when she ran in a hotly contested mayoral race against Southfield Mayor Donald Fracasani.

City officials said there is nothing personal about their response: "It just doesn't sound like a good deal," Southfield parks and recreation director Jeff Farland said earlier.

Though reaction from nearby homeowners to the park plan was decidedly mixed, several Southfield residents showed up at the commission's public hearing Wednesday morning to ask commissioners to go ahead with plans for the park.

"I'm in favor of a park. I think it would be the best use for it," said resident John O'Conner, who owns the dam on the lake in his backyard. "There are not a lot of places left in Southfield like this."

Southfield resident Sandra Zhihar agreed.

"It's one of the few natural places left in paved-over Southfield," she said, adding that the naturally wooded area is food for the soul. "And nature is one of the few places people say they can feel at one with their God."

# Gone fishin': derby set

BY LARRY O'CONNOR  
STAFF WRITER

Stories about the ones that get away will be heard now that Shilwassee Park has landed a fishing derby.

The competition Saturday, April 29, is a joint venture for kids and adults alike. Children will fish from 9-10:30 a.m.; adults join the casting fray from 10:30 a.m. until noon.

The tributary of the Rouge River will be stocked with trout 10-15 inches in length. Fish are contained within a specific area, using a mesh fencing running to each river bank.

Farmington Hills Parks Superintendent Andy Lang and city naturalist Joe Derek gave a derby preview at Monday's Farmington City Council meeting. Farmington Hills and Farmington are working together on this year's event.

"Let's go fishing," said Farmington Mayor Arnie Campbell. A pond on the Orchard Ridge campus of Oakland Community College in Farmington Hills was the site of last year's derby.

Only 75 were allowed to fish. Two or many — 150 — will be able to participate at Shilwassee Park, organizers said. The river setting, with overhanging trees and shade, provides cooler waters, which trout thrive in, Derek said.

Organizers will meet with Department of Natural Resources personnel to discuss any pollution concerns.

Southfield, through which the Upper Rouge flows, has sponsored a fishing derby for the past 11 years. Participants there are allowed to keep up to five fish they catch.

At the moment, Farmington favors a catch-and-release pro-

gram. "I'd like to see a catch-and-keep," Farmington's Campbell said.

Added Lang, "It's not a river without life. To what degree of pollution there is, we're going to try and determine that before (the derby)."

Fishing will take place on both sides of the river, but will be limited to the Power Road side of the park. Organizers will get a special DNR permit to allow people to fish without a license during the derby.

No fee will be charged to participants. A vendor in Kalkaska, Mich. will supply the trout.

"You haven't thought about putting lobster in there, have you?" asked Farmington Councilman Dick Tupper jokingly.

No mention of largemouth bass, either.

# Oil from page 1A

In residential areas, the company drills into the property from outside, where it owns property, Gottschalk said. When residents sell their oil and gas rights, they get royalties from any production. If a company does strike gas or oil on its property, it will likely drain the resources from nearby property.

"That means that if they don't sell their oil or gas rights, they either don't get any benefit, they would have to do their own drilling, or get a competitor to come in," he said. "That would hurt them, we might lose out to the competitor who probably wouldn't give them as good a deal, and there would have to be another drilling site."

But the company has run afoul of the city, which looks upon the activity of trying to buy up the oil and gas rights as soliciting.

Tom Blaisell, director of public services for Farmington Hills, has

written the company, directing it to stop the activity. Blaisell, who said the city had complaints about the same type of activity last year, doesn't buy the distinction between buying and selling.

"The ordinance was designed specifically to address this type of situation," Blaisell said.

Any company interested in soliciting must register with the city beforehand. Blaisell said West Bay has yet to do so.

Gottschalk said not only is his company not soliciting, but to register its intentions would be a call to competitors to try for the same leases.

Leibson said he's prepared for a "crusade" to keep West Bay out of the subdivision bordered by Eight Mile, Halsted and I-75.

"All of us got blindsided," he said. "You don't know what will be pumped into the ground when they leave."

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