

IN THE PAPER TODAY

Dress down — pay up: Some Farmington city employees have been paying for the privilege of casual dressing. A local charity will benefit. /3A

Believe it! The notion that keeping communities beautiful is an important part of their viability and value is finding believers in Michigan. /3A

Great Visions: Visions Unlimited, a school that provides programs and services to handicapped students, is the subject of this month's Partnerships column. /3A

Sting in the air: Farmington Hills police announced that they will be conducting the annual liquor enforcement operation during the holidays. /5A

TASTE

Festive feasts: For hassle-free holiday dining, let them eat roast. /1B

Pop the corks: Giving a gift of wine is easy and welcomed. /1B

BUSINESS

Business moves: The Observer's Business Milestones column highlights promotions, transfers, hirings, openings and other business moves with a Farmington-area connection. /10C

MALLS & MAINSTREETS

Belly basics: A hometown gal makes good with a box of maternity fashions that is earning millions. /5C

United we stand: Independent merchants join up with trade associations as they continue to battle the retail giants for sales and shoppers. /5C

SPORTS

Winning strokes: How will Farmington-area high school boys swimming teams fare this season? Previews appear today. /1C

Top cage folks: Who was named to the Observer's All Area Girls Basketball Team? The honored players are listed. /1C

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Itsomi Koga

Mom awaits bond hearing

A Japanese woman, who'll stand trial on first-degree murder charges in the drowning of her infant son, needs hospitalization, not jail, say her attorneys.

BY BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

The mother of a drowned baby boy will face first-degree murder charges at her Dec. 28 Oakland Circuit Court arraignment.

The attorneys for Itsomi Koga had unsuccessfully argued at a preliminary

examination Nov. 22 that their client had not planned to kill her 26-day-old son (Tomoyuki) on Nov. 2.

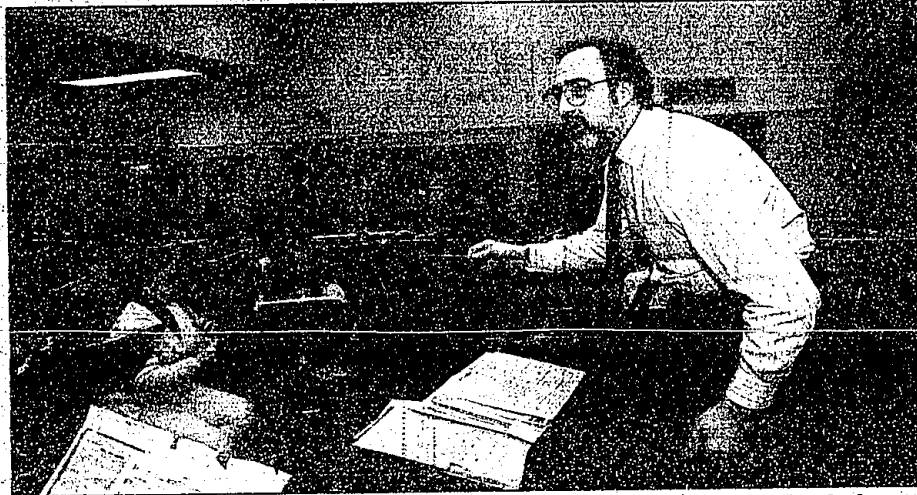
Judge Maria Parker ruled Friday in 47th District Court that there was probable cause as supported by case law and Michigan law to find that the defendant, 34, had committed first degree murder.

"There was enough time that a reasonable person could have changed her mind," Judge Parker said of the time element required for premeditation.

Attorneys Neil Fink and Carol Stanyar, representing the Japanese national who has been living in this country for almost three years with her engineer husband Akihiko, 33, asked that bond be provided so that their client could be hospitalized for her depression and other possible mental problems.

See MOTHER, 2A

He's the leader of the band



TOM HANLEY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Harrison's Mark Phillips: "In a band or a symphony, everyone is important. Everyone is on the stage performing. Everyone has a responsibility."

Phillips snared as band teacher of year

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

The selection of Mark Phillips as Michigan School Band & Orchestra Teacher of the Year for Oakland and Livingston Counties is based on one lively number: 210.

It's not too snappy but carries a large heartbeat. The figure roughly represents the number of student musicians he instructs.

Phillips directs the Harrison High marching and concert bands, orchestra and symphony. And if that's enough to get John Coltrane tooting

his horn, Phillips is also in charge of the school's two jazz groups. "It's never a dull moment," said district music coordinator Paul Barber.

It's never a silent one, either. Harrison High's bands and orchestras have traditionally garnered superior marks at regional, state and national festivals.

During the past three years, Harrison musicians have qualified 115 events for state solo ensemble. In 1995 alone, Harrison made the grade in 62 events with 42 of those receiving Division One ratings.

To anyone who is not a band

member, parent or booster, those facts won't mean much.

But to plan, prod, practice and get such large ensemble of students to perform consistently is something any football coach named Bo, Mo and Woody could reverse.

"When you have a basketball team, you have five players on the floor and 10 on the subs bench," Phillips said. "In a band or a symphony everyone is important. Everyone is on the stage performing. Everyone has a responsibility."

"When kids learn that responsibility, they learn to carry it through."

Phillips sits in a room, sequestered in the bowels of the school. A window looks into the large band room, which is oddly quiet and empty.

A stream of kids normally wanders in and out, Phillips said. The place is a student sanctuary for tuning instruments, doing homework or eating lunch.

On Thursdays, private instructors come in to provide lessons. Band boosters raise money to pay for the instructors.

See PHILLIPS, 4A

Kurzeja should keep council down to earth

BY BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

Trying to put a label on Masale Kurzeja, Farmington Hills' newest city council member, is probably a mistake.

Kurzeja, 59, has risen from humble beginnings to become one of the city's most well-respected voices for community involvement. Born in Kankakee and raised in her early years in a one-room cabin, Kurzeja lost her father before her first birthday.

Her mother, Dixie, and family moved to West Virginia where she re-

married, and was once again widowed.

"She had been widowed twice by the time she was 25," Kurzeja said. "It was hard for her."

It has been at times a struggle for Masale Kurzeja and her family as well. But the mother of four and grandmother of seven has been involved in one way or another since township days.

FARMINGTON HILLS

"At one time you couldn't park a pickup truck in your drive," she said. "It took three years to get it changed. But people like pickup trucks so it made sense."

Kurzeja was selected by a 4-2 vote at the Dec. 11 regular city council meeting to fill the seat vacated by newly-elected Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi. She would have to run in August to retain the seat until 1997.

"I'd love to run," she said. "I think if people see my concerns and understand me, things will work out."

Kurzeja has been a member of the zoning board of appeals (ZBA), sat in on council meetings for 13 years before they were abolished and has been close to other housing and neighborhood issues, especially in her Olds Town neighborhood. But those who selected her don't see that as a limitation.

"I think she was the best choice,"

See KURZEJA, 9A

Candidates spent most of what they raised

BY BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

Farmington Hills candidate Paul Sowerby lost his bid to become the city's first directly-elected mayor, but it wasn't because he scrimped on his campaign.

Sowerby, who was defeated by 3,188 votes (61-38 percent, 1 percent write-ins), had and spent the largest campaign war chest of any candidate in November's city election.

The Hills attorney raised \$42,511.53 by the Oct. 22 first-filing deadline and an additional \$3,974 after that for a total of \$46,485.53.

Most of Sowerby's contributors over the final week leading up to the election were \$100 or less, with James Altschach contributing \$200, Tejinder Chhatwal contributing \$500, Sowerby's attorney partner Charles Marx gave \$150 for a total of \$230 and George Ross gave \$195 for a total of \$995.

Sowerby spent most of the money in the final days of the campaigning on direct mailing, brochures and telemarketing. He ended the campaign with no balance or debt.

Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi, who said he spent much more than he had wanted, raised \$9,787.50 by Oct. 22 and raised an additional \$2,750 for a total of \$12,537.50. He spent a total of \$11,877.77, leaving a balance of \$1,100.25.

Dr. Albert Searchilli (\$200), Judith McGinn (\$100) and Vagnozzi himself (\$1,200) were his biggest contributors with most others being \$50 or less during the final days of the campaign.

The bulk of Vagnozzi's contributions during the final days of the campaign went to mailing and cable TV advertisements.

Among the city council candidates, Dennis Fitzgerald had raised \$6,154.60 by Oct. 27, but was late in filing for the Dec. 7 final filing deadline.

Former Mayor Ben Marks had raised \$6,806 by Nov. 27 and raised an additional \$950 between

See CANDIDATES, 7A