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IN THE PAPER TODAY

Not guilty: Dr. Jack Kevorjian heard those sweet words "not guilty" in his assisted suicide trial. /10A

GUILTY: A Detroit man will be sentenced March 29 in Oakland Circuit Court after pleading guilty to manslaughter in the hit-and-run death of a Farmington Hills boy. /5A

Quite an honor: The VFW and Optimist Club have honored a Farmington Hills police officer and firefighter. /3A

Presidential preference: Farmington-area voters will take different routes to indicate their choices for President of the United States. /3A

TASTE

National nutrition month: Shape up for spring. Local community hospitals can help you win the battle of the bulge. /1B

SPORTS

Court battle: Mercy High School's volleyball team competed Saturday in the regional volleyball tournament at Ferndale. /1C

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Warrant pending against student suspect in NFHS hate letter chaos

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Farmington Hills police are seeking a warrant against a North Farmington High student in connection with hate letters that were left in lockers of African-American students.

Two North students had racial slurs written inside lockers in January. Three notes containing racial invectives and threats were also found in student lockers.

Police are asking the student be charged with malicious annoyance rather than ethnic intimidation. The suspect is black.

The incident caused a media frenzy at the Farmington Hills school as many speculated the notes signaled racial problems at the school.

The notes, themselves, were sent to the Michigan Police crime lab for analysis. Hills Police Chief Bill Dwyer wouldn't elaborate on the investigation.

"It's one person," Dwyer said. "That's all I'll say."

Dwyer met with Farmington Schools officials Friday. Police and the schools are expected to release a joint statement on Monday.

If a warrant is issued, it's the second such incident to occur within a year. A Farmington Hills African-American couple's home was vandalized during Memorial Day weekend in what was initially reported as a racially motivated attack.

A black teen has been charged in that case, which is believed to be gang-related.

"It's just very unfortunate the speculation by the news media caused the damage it did to this community," Dwyer said. "A community that is very culturally diverse and for a number of years has taken the appropriate steps that welcome all (people)."

School officials said they are relieved that the North Farmington incident wasn't racially motivated. They are working with police and the family in a confidential manner, said Don Cowan, executive director of Kindergarten through Grade 12 Instruction.

The incident itself didn't tarnish the school district's image, Cowan said.

"But the media . . . has led people to make certain assumptions that these are racial problems," Cowan said.

"We just want to get on with education and kids concentrating on the right things."

Moonlight sale spotlights business



BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

When the moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie, that's a . . . sale in downtown Farmington.

With apologies to Dean Martin, local merchants of business (not Venice) want to croon their own cashing tune Friday, March 15. Down-

town Farmington merchants hope their cash registers are chirping and beeping merrily away next Friday, March 15, during the Downtown Farmington Business Association's inaugural Moonlight Madness Sale.

The event goes all day until 10 p.m. Three spotlights will illuminate the sky and call attention to the downtown area.

Moonlight Madness features sidewalk sales and a prize raffle for \$700

in Farmington "Mad" money, which can be redeemed at Downtown Farmington Business Association member outlets. Raffle tickets are \$1 each or 6 for \$5. The drawing is April 20.

Also, stores will be giving away 150 free passes to the Civic Theatre.

Another highlight is an "Ask the Experts" panel, which will answer questions 6-9 p.m. in the Village Mall and Civic Theatre lobby.

Dr. John Cromwell of Cromwell Family Chiropractic has assembled people from the medical, banking, insurance and home improvement professions to answer questions.

Merchants see the day-long sale as a way to lure new customers. Many downtown businesses are only open until 5 or 6 p.m. weekdays and are usually closed on Sundays.

"We find there's a lot of people out walking their dogs and window shopping," said Bev Brown, owner of Touch of Romance. "This will be a way to bring them inside."

Merchants are also looking for people from outside Farmington who might not be familiar with the downtown area.

See MOONLIGHT, 2A

This teacher's heart is in the homeroom



Top teacher: Pam Ellis, with a Teacher-of-the-Year award to her credit, works with student Michelle Baithus in her classroom.

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Homeroom takes on a new dimension for Flanders Elementary teacher Pam Ellis.

The Farmington school could be considered a second mailing address. When not at home, Ellis is usually there. If they want to see their wife and mother, so too are husband, Tim, and children, Missy and T.J.

Her mother and stepfather also visit occasionally to help out on school math nights. Her mother-in-law drops by once in awhile. Second and third cousins are unaccounted for, though.

Homeroom is where her heart is. "To me this is what teaching is: You give your heart and soul," said Ellis, 33, who has taught 10 years at Flanders.

Oakland Schools agrees. The intermediate school district has named Ellis the Newsweek-WDIV Oakland County Elementary teacher of the year.

Ellis will join other award recipients from Wayne and Macomb counties and Detroit Public Schools at a banquet in May. Award winners receive \$2,000 from Newsweek-WDIV.

The fifth grade instructor is taken back by the honor. Ellis is only doing what she always wanted since being in the third grade — teach.

Others told her no jobs were available in the profession. Nonetheless, the 1980 graduate of Northville High went on to get her bachelor's and master's degree from Eastern Michigan University.

Much like her career pursuit, Ellis remains unwavering in her teaching philosophy — All kids can learn.

"You have to find out what it is that sparks them, what it is that motivates them," Ellis said. "It's different for each child."

The lengths she'll go to discover the source takes her away from in front of the chalkboard.

She and her family attend student's baseball and hockey games, ballet and dance recitals. Visits to their homes are common, too.

Ellis has taught kindergarten, and second through fifth grade at Flanders. She had some students for three years.

"When she tries to do something with us she makes it fun," said fifth-grader Lauren Brantley, who had Mrs. Ellis as a second, fourth and fifth grade teacher. "But you're learning at the same time."

Children were reading a book called "Stone Soup," Brantley said.

See TEACHER, 2A

Accident claims West Bloomfield teen

BY BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER



Armen Papaghanian

Students and teachers at West Bloomfield High School were trying to cope with the death of a student who loved music and who excelled in computer graphics.

And Farmington Hills police are still trying to determine why a car carrying Armen Papaghanian, 17, of West Bloomfield and his brother Halg, 14, crossed the center line on Middlebelt Road, causing an accident that resulted in Armen's death Thursday night.

Armen Papaghanian died from injuries received when the 1995 Nissan Ultima he was driving crossed Middlebelt while headed south about a quarter of a mile south of 10 Mile at 7 p.m.

The car struck a northbound 1985 Dodge 600 driven by Nicholas Robert York, 17, of Farmington Hills, spun around and was struck on the driver's side by a 1988 Ford Explorer driven by Pasko Vuljovic, 38, of Farmington Hills.

The Explorer and the Nissan wound up on the east shoulder of the road.

Hills Traffic Supervisor Sgt. Dennis Green said the Ultima's air bags deployed, but the brunt of the crash came from the side.

"The road wasn't icy," Green said. "The shoulder was. But we don't know why the car crossed the center line and we may not know until we can talk to his brother. We'll try to determine the speed. But it appears that the driver (Armen Papaghanian) lost control."

Papaghanian's younger brother, Halg, 14, was a passenger in the front seat. He suffered serious injuries and was taken to Bozford General Hospital on Grand River and then air-lifted to the University of Michigan Medical Center in Ann Arbor

where he was in fair condition as of Friday afternoon.

Vuljovic, along with his wife and four children who were passengers in the Explorer, were taken to Providence Hospital in Southfield where they were treated and released. York was not injured.

"At school, Armen touched a lot of us," said Jeane Abbott, who taught the junior in two classes. "He was very outspoken and opinionated, which was really good. He was confident and outgoing."

Abbott said the boy loved music and played the drums in two different bands.

"He had callouses on his hands," she said. "His other passion was computer graphics. He took classes at the Oakland Center in computer graphics. He was very talented."

Both brothers were wearing seat belts, and alcohol does not appear to be a factor, police said. The death is the third traffic fatality in Farmington Hills in 1996.

See ACCIDENT, 5A