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IN THE PAPER TODAY

Top honor: Observer photographer Sharon LeMieux captured first place in a national contest for newspapers. /A2

Pack's back: A Farmington man proudly stuck with his Green Bay Packers in the tough times and now proudly displays his support. /A3

COUNTY

Inner circle: True to his word, county prosecutor-elect Dave Gorycyca has appointed an inner staff with extensive experience in key areas. /A7

BUSINESS

Keeping SCORE: The Society of Retired Executives continues to help new companies throughout Oakland County get up on their feet. /F1

SPECIAL SECTIONS

Heartwarming: Gift ideas, recipes and remembrances of holidays past, fill our second seasonal gift guide. Look for it among the inserts in today's Farmington Observer Newspaper.

REAL ESTATE

Look ahead: The Building Industry Association's incoming president sees the demand for skilled laborers outstripping the supply. /G1

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Suspect's pants found in victim's home after break-in

By MATT JACHEMAN
STAFF WRITER

You might say James Clarence Dorre got caught with his pants down.

Actually, according to police, Dorre's pants were off — and sitting in a Livonia house he had recently broken into — when he was arrested Dec. 4 on an unrelated charge in Farmington Hills. Instead, he was wearing a pair of Levi's and other clothing taken, along with cash, credit cards and other things, from the house on Parkdale, police say.

Dorre, 32, is now charged with second-degree home invasion and larceny from a building. He is also charged as a habitual offender. Dorre stood mute at his Dec. 5 arraignment, and 16th District Court Magistrate Dennis Eppler entered a not-guilty plea for him. Eppler set bond at \$250,000 cash or surety. Dorre was being held Tuesday in the Wayne County Jail. He is due back in court Tuesday for a preliminary examination.

According to a Livonia Police Department report, police in Farmington Hills arrested Dorre the evening of Dec. 4 on a marijuana-possession charge. A search of the car he was driving turned up clothing, including a \$400 leather coat, and credit cards, a briefcase and a duffel bag later identified as belonging to a man at the house on Parkdale. There was also some cash.

With Dorre in custody, a Farmington Hills police sergeant called the Parkdale resident, who then reported the break-in to police in Livonia. That house had been entered through an unlocked side door, police said.

While an officer was taking the burglary victim's report at his house, the two found clothing the resident didn't recognize. A pair of work pants had a name tag that said "Jim Dorre," and a jacket had "James" emblazoned on the front, the report said. There were also a pair of shoes and a shirt.

In addition to the clothing, luggage and credit cards, the burglary victim also had about \$135 cash, a pair of boots and a cordless telephone.

The phone was found in a trash bin inside the men's room of a Livonia restaurant, and Dorre was believed to be wearing the boots, police said.



Visiting with the big man: Julie Conroy, 6, decides what to ask of Santa this year while her brother, Nathan, waits his turn.

Sharp-dressed man lands in town to the glee of children, merchants

By LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

He's a wanted man in Farmington. He's described as a heavy-set male with a white beard. Witnesses say he prefers wearing a red jump suit with matching hat. His name may be Santa but also goes by "St. Nick," "Jolly One," or "Kris Kringle."

If you see this man, authorities urge only one thing: Could you ask him to come back to downtown Farmington?

And soon.

Kids, parents and merchants love the roly-poly North Pole resident, judging by turnout last Saturday.

"Holiday Hunting" event in downtown was a success by all accounts: Some 400 well-wishers greeted Santa as he made his customarily flamboyant arrival by helicopter in the Downtown Center parking lot.

Farmington Mayor Pro-Tem Mary Bush and other city officials received Santa with Yuletide glee. Farmington librarian Marilyn Smith presented him with a storybook.

Sunny skies and somewhat mild over 30-degree temperatures also greeted Santa and well-wishers, who strolled themselves to shopping opportunities downtown.

"We had more kids than ever before," said Sara Warren, owner of Warren's Corner on Farmington Road. "It's a very nice event; it brings in a lot of people. With Santa and the carolers, it's a nice festive atmosphere."

The holiday kickoff certainly helps put a little jingle in merchants' pockets. A later Thanksgiving this year left few traditional shopping days before Christmas.

A trolley whisked shoppers to downtown sites, while carolers straight from a Dickens novel serenaded pedestrians.

More than 400 people showed up for free showings



It must be the red suit: Drawing a crowd in Farmington last week was a visitor from the north, who dropped in via helicopter.

of "Prancer" at the Civic Theatre.

"It was a good turnout," Civic owner Greg Hohler said.

Dagwood's Deli had a few ravenous Santa spotters drop by, too. "We had a lot more kid business than adults," Dagwood's manager Patti McShane said.

The Downtown Development Authority sponsored the event as "Holiday Hunting," which sent children scurrying for "treasures" at area businesses. At Books Abound, Chinese finger handcuffs were given away while Warren's Corner passed out bracelets with smiling faces on them.

More than a few Chinese finger handcuffs were left over at the book store, an employee said. Santa's arrival and "Holiday Hunting" promotion is intended to provide a more long-term arresting effect, though.

"I think any promotion that brings people downtown is good," Hohler said. "I don't think you see a direct effect in terms of sales. I think it comes indirectly... just familiarizing people with downtown."

Hills aims to guard valuable rights-of-way

By WILLIAM COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

Farmington Hills is considering spending some PROTECTION money to defend municipal ownership of public rights-of-way.

Council members passed a strongly worded resolution at the Dec. 2 regular meeting urging the Michigan Municipal League "to take strong action to assure the rights of municipalities and their taxpayers" to protect rights-of-way.

"We want to protect our rights-of-way and receive fair compensation for the use of those," City Manager Dan Hobbs told council members.

"This is a statewide and national issue."

In addition, Hobbs had presented the council with an option of joining PROTEC, a group of 10 communities including Dearborn, Livonia and Southfield, that are contributing money based on population to the lobbying effort aimed at protecting the member cities.

The acronym stands for the Michigan Coalition to Protect Public Rights-of-Way from Telecommunications Encroachments. It is a regional reaction to Federal Communications Commission rulings "federalizing" traditional state and local

rights-of-way authorities and "nationalizing" state and local property rights, said Dearborn Mayor Michael Guido in July.

Telecommunications companies normally reimburse municipalities for the use of rights-of-way for their equipment. The effect of the 1996 Federal Communications Act is to eliminate traditional cable television franchise authority of local governments.

■ 'What we're talking about is \$300,000 in franchising fees that would be lost if they (companies) could bypass payment for rights-of-way.'

Aldo Vagnozzi
—mayor, Farmington Hills

Hills council members agreed that the city has to take steps to protect itself. But they weren't sure what group to join. It would cost \$25,000 for Farmington Hills to join PROTEC.

See RIGHT-OF-WAY, A8

It's a changing world

Botsford Health Care Continuum hosted a community breakfast last week to highlight Botsford's evolution over the years. And the presentation wasn't without a bit of humor.

As various civic leaders heard about the growth of Botsford from its early days as a hospital in 1865 through its various acquisitions and growth, hospital President Gerson Cooper noted that much has changed in our view of health and living.

"Once upon a time, 60 was considered old," Cooper began.

As he paused, Botsford Chairman of the Board Edward Hodges III declared, "Not any more."

FARMINGTON FOCUS

Skating club grows

The Farmington Hills Figure Skating Club is in the midst of a fund-raising effort, according to club President Susan McKendrick. One of the clubs adult skaters, Lisa Sauer, placed in a U. S. Figure Skating Association regional competition in Carmel, Ind. and will compete in the nationals.

The club, which began with some 30 members has grown to about 100, McKendrick said, adding that there are lessons and activities year round.

"We have an extensive summer program," she said. For information about the club, call 476-2109.

Safe crossing

AAA Michigan recently cited Farmington and Farmington Hills for pedestrian safety. Farmington Mayor JoAnne McShane and Public Safety Director Gary Goss were presented an award for going 18 years without a pedestrian death, competing among 614 cities of similar population.

In Farmington Hills, Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi was honored for going one year without a pedestrian death, competing against 129 other cities with similar population.

Portable rooms fuel bond proposal

Reducing the need for portable classrooms may drive part of Farmington Public Schools' proposed \$110 million bond issue for building renovations. The school board is weighing the plan.



By LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Portable classrooms — love 'em or leave 'em, kids still have to learn

in them. They've become symbols of suburban growth, if not reminders of school facility planners enrollment miscalculations.

A financial strategies team is using the movable learning centers as a reason to encourage Farmington Public Schools to seek a \$110 million bond issue to help pay for building renovations and additions. Farmington Board of Education trustees have not yet decided if they will go to the voters with the bond request.

Fifteen portable classrooms are in use district wide. North Farmington High has three and Farmington High two. The rest are used at the elementary level.

Many are nearing 20 years old and would be difficult to sell, said Don Cowan, K-12 instruction director.

"They're not built to last 20 years," Cowan said.

At elementary schools, they are used for art and music classes. Or, as in the case of Eagle Elementary, a portable is used as regular classroom to free up space in the main building for an art class.

"They're really not that disdained, especially with elementary staff," Cowan said. "They're liked them and feel (the portables) give them a little home."

Longacre Elementary has two portables. They have their pros and cons, said Principal Bill Smith.

Portables are air-conditioned, making them comfortable during hot days in early fall or late spring. Since Longacre's are used for vocal and instrumental music, the accompanying sounds don't permeate the rest of the main building, Smith said.

Yet, as a building administrator, there is a gnawing feeling that comes with not having everyone under the same roof.

"In terms of where the portables are placed here, I'd feel a lot more

See PORTABLES, A8