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IN THE PAPER TODAY

Warm and caring: Friends and family remember a Farmington School District secretary who died unexpectedly. /A2

Bunny times: Youngsters of all ages enjoyed a visit Saturday at Heritage Park. /A3



COMMUNITY LIFE

Top of her class: Mercy High School Principal Sister Regina Doelker is honored as Catholic school principal of the year. /B1

AT HOME

Special arrangements: Gardeners from Farmington Hills are among those fashioning some of the more than 500 displays at "An American Bouquet," this year's Ann Arbor Flower & Garden Show. /D6

ENTERTAINMENT

Youth theater: Children in the Marquis Theatre and Paper Bag Players shows learn to get in the act and get along with others. /E1

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Without batting an eye



They're our friends: Laurie Nelson of the Organization for Bat Conservation, holds Mogli, an Egyptian fruit bat (and he holds onto her) as she educates the children at Beechview about some of the myths of bats. For more on the visit, see Page A4.

STAFF PHOTO BY SULLIVAN LASKERLIS

Officials plot future after bond is rejected

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Farmington Public School officials are plotting what to do next after voters said "no" Tuesday to a \$110 million bond issue but "yes" to a millage renewal.

The bond proposal's narrow defeat by 195 votes — with a margin of 51.5 percent against to 48.5 percent in favor — left school officials disappointed but not despondent.

Whatever happens, Superintendent Bob Maxwell said, "... We have a strong base to go back on." Voters did approve a tax renewal of 1.7603 mills on homesteads and 5.91966 mills on non-homestead through 2001. The vote margin was 63 percent to 37 percent.

Some 12 percent — 6,746 of 56,144 registered voters — cast ballots in the special election.

Money from the sale of \$110 million in bonds would have paid for building renovations and technological improvements.

Officials saw the \$92 million in proposed upgrades to the district's 28 buildings as particu-

Vote Totals	
■ \$110 million bond	
Yes	3,267
No	3,462
■ Millage renewal	
Yes	4,522
No	2,487

See VOTE, A7

Teens accuse teacher of sex, drugs offenses

BY BILL CASPER
STAFF WRITER

Two teenage brothers testified Tuesday they were given marijuana before and after they had sex with a 41-year-old Redford Township man, who teaches special education in Farmington schools.

Jeffrey A. Downing is charged with six counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, one count of delivery of marijuana and one count of manufacturing or growing marijuana. All are felonies.

The older brother, 17, testified he had sex with Downing more than 30 times over two years. That included a period when he was locked up in the Wayne County Youth Home and later at Camp Oakland. During that time, he would receive weekly and passes.

"I thought he was a friend," the 17-year-old said.

See TESTIMONY, A7

Gunmen rob Hills theater

BY WILLIAM COVANT
STAFF WRITER

Farmington Hills police are looking for leads in an armed robbery at the United Artists West River Theatre on Grand River Saturday night.

"Unfortunately, the guy (victim) wasn't able to see any faces," said Detective Sgt. Tim Swanson.

A theater employee told police that he was counting the night's receipts at about 10:55 p.m. when someone knocked at the door to his office on the second floor. The man's back was turned and the employee thought it was another employee.

When the employee opened the door, the man grabbed him from behind, put a gloved hand over his mouth and forced him to lie face down on the floor.

The robber and a second man then put "flex cuffs," plastic devices used to bind hands, on the victim.

The second man had put something against the victim's back, which he believed was a gun, according to police reports.

The robbers took \$4,287 in cash and threw a leather jacket over the victim's face.

The victim was able to get out of the cuffs and call police.

He described one of the men as black, 5-foot-10, 160 pounds, between 18-22 years old, wearing a red scarf and dark coat. The other was 5-foot-10, 185 pounds and wore a blue ski mask and black gloves.

The victim did not get a good look at either man, police said.

Swanson said police often use the "flex cuffs" as a backup for regular cuffs and the devices are used by electricians to bundle wires.

The theater has two stairways leading to the projection room by the office, Swanson said. And there is a combination lock that was opened to the hallway leading to the office.

"Several people would know the combination," Swanson said, adding that hasn't narrowed the number of possible suspects significantly.

"We haven't heard of any similar robbery," he said. "Right now, we don't have a lot to go on."

Anyone with information should call 473-9900.

'Elegant but simple' is The Legacy's formula

BY GARY WOROBCIAK
STAFF WRITER

Hector Puente is talking about his new Farmington Hills restaurant, The Legacy Dinner Club, when a waitress across the room distracts the conversation.

She's addressing a large table of women at lunch's end, speaking with a cadence that would almost make one think she's about to break into song.

Sure enough, server Kathleen Walters methodically tells a story that leads into a rather fine and powerful a cappella version of "Over the Rainbow."

Puente shrugs and smiles. "She just loves to sing."

Personality. The Legacy has plenty of it, and much of it is Puente's, who, along with fiancée Angela Frederick, designed the transformation of what once was a bank into a unique restaurant that is, as he puts it, "elegant but simple."

There was nothing simple about taking a bank and making it a dinner club, however. The renovation of the former Comerica building on Grand River, between Drake and Halsted, took well over a year.

It took six weeks just to remove the door of the vault, which was converted into the kitchen's walk-in cooler. (To the question, did they leave any money behind, Puente laughs genuinely and says, "I checked and double-checked.")

What once was the drive-through window area is now a patio. The bar is where taller windows once stood. But if it's unique for a bank to

See LEGACY, A4

Celebrating her 102nd

Frances Rabat, a Marlan Oakland West resident for the last 16 years, will celebrate her 102nd birthday Friday.

Farmington Hills Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi made the announcement at Monday's council meeting and will present her with a proclamation at a dinner on her birthday.

A Lukovac, Yugoslavia native, and the youngest of eight children, Rabat emigrated to the United States in 1922. She cared for Leo, her husband of 57 years, when he developed Parkinson's disease.

The mother of three daughters — Dolores,

FARMINGTON FOCUS

Betsy and Beatrice — enjoys family visits with her six grandchildren and 13 great grandchildren. Over the years, she has enjoyed sewing, crocheting and reading. She is fluent in Croatian, as well as English.

Harrison Robo-Hawks soar

Some Harrison High School students used their engineering talents against students from

around the country in the FIRST national engineering competition at William Rainey Harper College near Chicago, March 6-8.

Eight faulty members and 27 TRW engineers worked with the 22 Harrison students for six weeks, helping them brainstorm, design, build and test their "Champion Robot."

Fitted against 38 other robots from as far away as Texas, Arizona, Florida and Puerto Rico, the Robo-Hawks won three of five matches in their first day of competition and won trophies as the Rookie of the Year and Spirit of the Competition awards.

The tournament featured referees, time clocks and, yes, cheerleaders.



Singing service: The Legacy Dinner Club waitress Kathleen Walters of Detroit alternates between show tunes, opera and an occasional "Happy Birthday" in Italian. Above, she sings for Dorothy Gillette of Southfield, who was joined by her husband, Lou, and their Farmington Hills friends Jane McNamara and her husband, Al Horner.

STAFF PHOTO BY SULLIVAN LASKERLIS