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## They'll wait for miracle



By TIM SMITH  
STAFF WRITER  
Mike Garr called the odds "astronomical" that his daughter Melissa could be knocked into a coma by a tumbling tree limb. So why can't those odds happen again, this time with a miracle? "She already played those odds," said Garr, a fire lieutenant with the Farmington Hills Fire Department. "So maybe she could play those odds again and make a recovery." That is why doctors at Universi-

ty of Michigan Medical Centers in Ann Arbor tomorrow will perform a tracheostomy and insert a gastrointestinal tube, measures to reduce sources of infection and keep Melissa strong for what could be a long battle. The daughter of Mike and Susan Garr was critically injured at the Farmington Glen Aquatic Center on July 23, where she was watching three children swim. "We're going to give her a chance," Garr said. "I'm waiting for her to sing and dance, do something to convince the doctors. To make them see this is worthwhile. If not..."

He exhaled heavily, looked down at the floor and then said, "She'll be missed." Garr said he is prepared to wait indefinitely for "some kind of sign that would give doctors what they call a purposeful response. Like, 'Melissa, open your eyes.' To be able to process a command and act on it." So far, that has not occurred. Melissa's injuries were so severe that only the lower brain stem is showing activity, according to recent neurological tests. The brain stem controls basic physical function. The teen does have a  
Please see MIRACLE, A6

## Mom performs in tribute to Melissa

By TIM SMITH  
STAFF WRITER

Tonight is Melissa Garr's night. Her mother, Susan Garr, will provide piano accompaniment during a special tribute-to-Melissa concert by the Farmington Community Chorus. The free concert, dedicated to Melissa, is scheduled from 8-9 p.m. today, Thursday, Aug. 14, at Heritage Park, on Farmington Road between 10-11 Mile. "Susan already knows Melissa is in a better place," said Kathy Hall, manager of the community chorus, "and that she'll be sitting in the front row." Spiritually speaking, of course, Melissa, 16,  
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### Squeeze play



PHOTOS BY JEFF KROENKE

Challenging: Last weekend's "Community Challenge," hosted by the Farmington YMCA and Healthy People for Healthy Oakland, brought 425 people from across Farmington and Farmington Hills to take part in 19 events, including basketball, volleyball and swimming. Above, Mohamad Bachrouche of Farmington Hills, tries to escape an inflatable tunnel at Heritage Park. During the awards banquet, YMCA team members, right, perform their rendition of the Village People song. A Michigan National Bank team took home the first-place trophy. The challenge was made possible by a state grant.



## Kevorkian, Good admit role in Hills suicide

By LARRY O'CONNOR  
STAFF WRITER

The body of a 34-year-old Long Beach, New York woman was found at a Farmington Hills hotel in an apparent suicide, which was in the presence of right-to-die advocate Dr. Jack Kevorkian and Janet Good. Both of their names were mentioned in a note found at the scene and Kevorkian's attorney Geoffrey Fieger later confirmed to Farmington Hills police that the suicide took place with the retired pathologist and Good present, Commander Chuck Nebus said. A housekeeper found the woman's body at 11:45 a.m. Wednesday in a room at the Holiday Inn on 10 Mile Road and notified police. "We'll treat this like we treat all of them, as a suspicious death," Chief Bill Dwyer said. "We'll proceed with our investigation and notify the prosecutor's office." Kevorkian's attorney Geoffrey Fieger could not be reached for comment. On Wednesday afternoon, Hills police were investigating the scene while waiting for the Oakland County Medical Examiner to arrive. The suicide is the second connected to Kevorkian and Good during the past two years in Farmington Hills. A 59-year-old Canadian man used Good's home in northwest Farmington Hills to take his own life in May 1996. Good is diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. The man suffered from multiple sclerosis. In the latest incident, a note alluded to why the 34-year-old took her life. "Something in the note said she had intolerable suffering," Dwyer said. "That's about as much as I can elaborate."

## Developer tells Hills to ante up

By LARRY O'CONNOR  
STAFF WRITER  
Farmington Hills doesn't have a downtown, but the proponent of a redevelopment that includes a controversial Super Kmart doesn't believe their project can move ahead without one. Malan Realty has asked to meet with the Farmington Hills City Council to pitch the notion of a downtown development authority and a tax incremental finance plan to go along with their proposed planned unit development on 76 acres near Orchard Lake and Northwestern Highway. A DDA and TIF or some other financial help is needed to offset some of the \$100 million needed to buy existing property and build, said Larry Lichtman, Malan Realty attorney. "It's of critical importance... whether or not to proceed," Lichtman said. "I think Malan's view is that proposals which have been made in the past have provided for much more intense commercial development." "What we're asking the city to consider is that if the city wants a significant residential component as well that they have to recognize the fact  
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## Verdict promises \$9.5 million to district

By TIM SMITH  
STAFF WRITER  
The recent state Supreme Court ruling in favor of school districts could add about \$9.5 million to the coffers of the Farmington Public School District, reimbursing money taken out of the general fund to pay for special education between 1991-94. But the ruling on the so-called Durant lawsuit, and promise of money, isn't being celebrated much by Superintendent Bob Maxfield. Also not worth celebrating, said Maxfield in his office Monday, is Gov. John Engler's decision Aug. 1 to veto portions of the School Aid Bill - including cutting at-risk categorical aid for special education children from poorer families - in order to pay the \$210 million Durant verdict. "You don't try to fix one problem by creating another one," said Maxfield, who also took part in Tuesday's Oakland Schools-hosted press conference

on the subject. He is president of the county's superintendents' association. "That anyone would even consider penalizing poor children in order to meet appropriate legal obligations... is unconscionable." About \$85 million in statewide special education funding for 1997-98 is needed to comply with the Supreme Court orders. The Farmington district is slated to get more money back than any other Oakland County district for the years

1991-92 through 1993-94, when it was an out-of-formula district. "We do have a large special education program," said director Janice Richards, "because of all the center programs we have, as well as the Boys and Girls Republic and Sarah Fisher Home. And it's a large district." In 1996-97, special education center programs operated for the county by Farmington schools included 200 non-  
Please see DISTRICT, A2

## Return engagement Civic's Hohler aims to protect family's jewel with DDA board encore

By TIM SMITH  
STAFF WRITER  
The aging Civic Theatre on Grand River is not as shiny as it once was. The crowds are not as massive. But for lifelong Farmington resident Greg Hohler, the 67-year-old movie house remains a jewel of the downtown area. And to protect the theater he took over in 1973 from his father (the late Edward J. Hohler) as well as help spark growth in the surrounding central business district, Hohler is returning to the Farmington Downtown Development Authority. Hohler, appointed by the city council on Aug. 4, fills the DDA vacancy created by the resignation of Nadine Rafurty. For Hohler, his appointment marks a return to the DDA, which he was forced to resign from in 1992 when he needed every bit of his time and energy to save the business started in 1940 by his father, first as manager and then owner of the two-story facility.

"Things that were started when I was previously on the DDA, the promotional concerts, events for children, are now going full-force under (the direction of) Judy Downey," he said. "You have to have these things to give people a reason to come downtown." And, once they do, to give them a reason to return. "Of course, it's unrealistic to think if you pull 200 people in for an event that they're all going to stop by their businesses... But the word spreads." Certainly, word-of-mouth helped keep the Civic going strong for years. Today, the 600-seat venue just east of Farmington Road is Michigan's oldest family-owned theater. But business hasn't always been swift and Hohler had to keep a keen eye on industry trends to keep the Civic afloat. One example was doing away with weekend matinees, extremely popular during his father's ownership in the 1960s and  
Please see CIVIC, A5



STAFF PHOTO BY BERTAN MITCHELL