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SEVENTY-FIVE CENTS

IN THE PAPER TODAY

At gunpoint: Three employees at a fast-food restaurant face a gunman. /A3

SCHOOLS

State update: See what's been happening at the state capitol and how it affects your schools. /A5

TASTE

Singing praises: Volunteers host "musical feasts" to support the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Last week's was at a home in Bloomfield Hills; next month it's in Farmington Hills. /B1

HEALTH

Healthy: Columnists Florine Mark, Keith Levich and Myrna Partrich focus on health. /B6

BUSINESS & FINANCE

In the green: Your street may contain several millionaires, says an investment planner. /F5

INDEX

■ Arts & Leisure	C
■ Automotive	J
■ Classified	D-G-J
■ Autos for sale	J6
■ Crossword	G4
■ Employment	H2
■ Home & Service Guide	J6
■ Index	H4
■ Real Estate	G1
■ Rentals	G6
■ Malls & Mainstreets	B4-5
■ Movie Guide	C4
■ New Homes	A7
■ Oakland Journal	F
■ Obituaries	B3
■ Road Watch	A5
■ Sports	D
■ Taste	B2
■ Travel	C8

FARMINGTON FOCUS

News to him

Early last week, Farmington Public Schools Superintendent Bob Maxfield levied some strong criticism of the Engler administration, following recent vetoes to the School Aid Bill that he saw as a response to the state Supreme Court's Durant lawsuit.

Maxfield railed against Engler's post-verdict decision to slice at-risk categorical aid for special education children from poorer families. "You don't fix one problem by creating another one. . . That anyone would even consider penalizing poor children in order to meet appropriate legal obligations. . . is unconscionable."

A press officer for Engler, asked to respond to Maxfield's criticism, faxed an Aug. 13 release from the governor. In part, it read as follows:

"Governor John Engler announced today that he will be calling a meeting with school superintendents from around the state to discuss potential financial decisions related to the Durant lawsuit settlement and the restoration of funding for at-risk funding."

Between songs of Thursday's tribute concert to Melissa Garr at Heritage Park, Maxfield was asked if he knew about the future Engler meeting, which has not yet been scheduled. Maxfield shrugged. "This is the first I heard about it."

The Farmington school chief also spearheaded Tuesday's Oakland Hills press conference about the subject. "It was a slim turnout," he said.

Hugs and prayers



After the show: Susan Garr hugs a member of the Farmington Community Chorus after the tribute concert for Garr's daughter, Melissa, who is in a coma.

500 share their love for Melissa at concert

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

Throughout the tribute concert to her daughter Thursday night at Heritage Park, Susan Garr maintained composure as she accompanied on the piano — with vigor — her extended family in the Farmington Community Chorus.

From "Look for the Silver Lining" through "Out There," Garr put up a brave front, enthusiastically striking the piano chords and even smiling often. Worn on her purple shirt was a large, shiny picture button of 16-year-old Melissa Garr, still comatose from injuries sustained when a thick tree branch dropped onto her head July 23.

But as soon as the last musical strains of "Out There" echoed over the hill, Susan could not hold it back any longer. Neither could the chorus members or many of the estimated 500 concert-goers, all there to show their support for 16-year-old Melissa.

With heartfelt applause filling the air above the risers, a very emotional Susan Garr exchanged hugs and tears with chorus members, family,



With feeling: Susan Garr's piano accompaniment to the Farmington Community Chorus added to the tribute Thursday. Below, Farmington High students hold candles and listen.



friends and some of Melissa's classmates at Farmington High School — who cupped lighted candles during the final number.

"The outpouring was palpable. I could feel the love that everybody had for my child," Susan Garr said, after hugging her 19-year-old son Adam. "And it makes me feel very proud of Melissa because she touched so many

Please see CONCERT, A2

Daughter 'with' mom during show

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

Her daughter remains connected to a life-support system. The chance of recovery is extremely poor. Yet Susan Garr managed to find the strength and courage to play the piano in front of 500 people Thursday night at Heritage Park in Farmington Hills.

How? The answer was as clear as the picture button of Melissa worn on her Farmington Community Chorus shirt.

"My daughter was with me," she said. "She would have been right at my side turning pages for me tonight. I just tried to

keep her in my thoughts because she would have wanted me to keep going."

Another answer was music, of which Susan and Melissa have always shared an affinity.

"She loves music and people and this chorus," Susan said, her voice choked with tears. "And

didn't work out. He's getting his shot.

The former minor league professional player wants to develop an ice skating training facility in the Industrial Park area of Farmington Hills. His company, Suburban Hockey, received site plan approval at Thursday's Farmington Hills planning commission meeting.

"How a hockey guy like me got involved with all this construction stuff I don't know," said Anastos, 34, shaking his head and cradling a pile of designs for his proposed double ice rink to his desk. "Holy moly."

Actually — as he's quick to point out — Anastos majored in construction management at Michigan State where he was a standout hockey player and had hopes of becoming a land developer if an NHL career

Please see RINK, A6

MS victim died from injection at Hills hotel



BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

A housekeeper found Karen Shoffstall in Room 500 at the Holiday Inn Wednesday, but the bed she was lying on was already made.

The hotel employee discovered Shoffstall, 34, with a pillow propped underneath her head. The dead woman was neatly dressed in a beige skirt and matching blouse, brown shoes, wristwatch on her left hand and wearing a necklace.

Shoffstall was lying face up with her hands across her stomach. Right-to-die advocates Dr. Jack Kevorkian and Farmington Hills resident Janet Good were present when she died, Hills police said.

Although the medical examiner's findings on the woman are not complete, the Long Beach, N.Y., resident appears to have suffered from multiple sclerosis, a disease that attacks the nervous system and causes muscle tremors or paralysis.

"There are changes that are consistent with multiple sclerosis," said Dr. Ljubisa Dragovic, Oakland County Medical Examiner. "There is damage to the white matter in the nervous system, which is the hallmark of multiple sclerosis."

The medical examiner said Shoffstall died by poisoning through intravenous injection. Her death is being ruled a homicide.

"When someone terminates their life, that is not a suicide," Dragovic said. "A suicide is a self-inflicted wound."

"In this particular case, this is out of the question because this lady was given barbiturates first in order to sleep."

Please see DEATH, A2

Parks tax team ready for fall vote

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

To chose up sides for the upcoming Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation millage renewal campaign is not as easy as picking teams for playground game of kick ball.

So far, there's no opposition. "I'm not expecting any, but you never know," said Paul Jacques, who is chairman of the pro-millage renewal "Say Yes to Parks" group. "If someone has a problem with it, I'd be happy to sit down with them and explain it."

The city of Farmington Hills will be asking voters Nov. 4 to approve a half-mill renewal of an existing tax rate to pay for parks and recreation upkeep and initiatives. Farmington Hills City Council approved \$19.5 million of parks and rec plans at its Aug. 11 meeting.

"It's important for residents to know it will not be a tax increase, but a continuation of a half-mill," Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi said. "This will continue it for another 10 years."

A half-mill renewal for 10 years would raise \$18 million. The other \$1.6 million in spending is expected to be paid through grants.

"What I would say to people is look at the last two millages where we said we would do certain things and we have accomplished them," Jacques said. "I think we've shown good faith and when we've asked for a millage we've performed as we said we would."

Previous parks and rec millages have made Pioneer, Woodland Hills and Founders parks possible. Tax money raised also helped pay for senior programs at the William Costick Center and the teen center program.

Renewal of a half-mill through the fiscal years 2008-09 would pay for park site acquisition, upkeep of existing facilities and to pay off debts associated with the Costick Center and Founders Park.

Please see PARKS, A2

Hockey pro's plan skates on

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Tom Anastos has gone from body checking to checking feasibility of architectural designs with the ease that Monet could've gone from pastels to water colors.

Yet he acts as if the brush weighs as much as a sledgehammer at times.

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Please see RINK, A6



ling: Tom Anastos, shown teaching at the Farmington Hills Ice Arena, hopes to open a training arena in town.