

Mr. Incognito headlines crime club event

More than 200 children and parents attended the first-ever gathering of Crime Prevention Kids Club members at the William Costick Center Saturday. A first in Michigan, the club has around 800 members and is getting rave reviews from law enforcement professionals — and the kids.

BY JONI HUBRED
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Mr. Incognito's friend Rocky the Raccoon has a problem.

He's a little ... disobedient. As Mr. Incognito, AKA Detroit police officer Brian Fountain, tried to talk with his audience of Crime Prevention Kids Club members at the William Costick Center in Farmington Hills Saturday, Rocky jammed up the volume on his boom box — eliciting gales of laughter from the more than 200 kids and parents who attended. While Rocky might be a troublemaker, Mr. Incognito told his audience, he'd had all his shots.

Not all raccoons and other wild animals are as safe.

"You see any wild animals on the playground, you don't pet them," Mr. Incognito said. "Go tell somebody."

The morning's show, hosted by the Farmington Hills Police Department, centered around messages of safety, but mostly, kids just had fun. The Crime Prevention Kids Club is the brainchild of Crime Prevention officer Bonnie Unruh, who put together the club.

Police Chief Bill Dwyer credits Unruh with its success, as well as the registration of 800 or so Crime Prevention Kids Club members, kids in kindergarten through fifth grade.

"This is so important, to get kids involved," he said. "It's important to catch them at this age. You lose a lot of kids by fifth grade."



Showtime: Mr. Incognito (Brian Fountain, left) and "Michael Jackson" (Ron Bledsoe, right) pose with Brandon Dwyer and Wesley Niemisto.

Fountain skillfully wove tips about dangers around the house and stranger danger into a presentation that included magic, card tricks and, of course, a cast of puppets like Rocky Raccoon. It's an act he's developed over the last 14 years as a Detroit police officer.

"I used to break dance," Fountain said after the show, as children and parents came up to have their pictures taken with him and his partner, Ron Bledsoe. "When I joined the police department, I realized I was too old to keep dancing. We had a magician who used to perform with us, so I thought 'Why not be a magician?'"

One of his fellow officers asked whether he could do a backyard children's party, and Fountain agreed. After it was over, a woman asked for his card, and his new career took off from there.

"We format our show for whatever venue we're doing," he said. "The show can be themed around anything. We just have fun. We don't really tell jokes, we just do stupid things and things that get the audience involved."

Fountain said the turnout Saturday

morning blew him away, and he appreciated his audience as much as they did him. Five-year-old Rachel Reynolds loved the part where Rocky kept turning up the music. Her mother, Sue, appreciated what the show taught kids — even though they already seemed to know quite a bit.

"I was impressed with how many of the 'darker' items they knew about," she said.

Sharon Hallochak and her daughter, Amy, share an enthusiasm for the club, through which kids receive a monthly newsletter and a decoder apple they can use to decipher special crime prevention messages.

"I think it's great," Sharon said. "She really looks forward to the newsletter and we go over it together."

Seven-year-old Amy, a student at Beechview, pronounced the club "cool."

After the show, Highland Park Police

Lt. Morris Cotton, a certified protection professional, substitute teacher and parent of 10-year-old Latoya, spoke with Unruh about starting a similar program in his department.

He was impressed with the morning's program from several perspectives.

"It sends a message of crime prevention in a humorous way," Cotton said. "It kept the attention of the children, while sending that message. As a teacher, I know how hard it is."

Dwyer said the club concept, which is the first of its kind in the state, was presented to the Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police, of which he is president.

"You have to give Bonnie Unruh so much credit for the job she's done with this," Dwyer said.

For more information about the Crime Prevention Kids Club, call 248-473-9640.

Lanigan students send get-well wishes

BY TIM SMITH
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Cheerful get-well cards and teddy bears were on their way to Children's Hospital in Detroit Thursday.

There, they would help boost the spirits of a Lanigan Elementary School fourth-grader, recovering from Wednesday's surgery to remove a bullet from his leg.

The boy was shot in the leg Tuesday night during an armed robbery attempt at The Rikshaw, his family's take-out restaurant in Detroit. Police are still looking for two men suspected in the attempt.

"The children are making get-well cards, and the teachers are sending stuffed animals and balloons," said Lanigan Principal Marva Turner. "Everybody is pretty upbeat here. We've kept the kids entertained about the progress the boy is making."

Turner said she talked to the injured boy's parents on Wednesday and gathered enough information to feel comfortable he will recover nicely. "He had surgery, he's in a cast, but he'll be OK."

"That he will recover was a big relief to everybody at Lanigan," Turner said. "We were very relieved to hear that."

After the youngster is released from the hospital, it will be a while before he returns to Lanigan. According to Turner, he will receive weekly visits at home from a teacher for an indefinite period.

His older sister will continue taking classes at the Farmington district school.

Meanwhile, Turner said other Lanigan students who might need to talk about the situation will have the opportunity to do so with Student Assistance Program Coordinator Mary Gispson. There also is a school crisis management team in place.

Debbie McCracken, of the school district superintendent's office, Friday said the name of the injured child was being withheld from the media out of respect for the family.

"We're not comfortable with releasing the name of an elementary school child, knowing how the family might feel about it," McCracken explained.

We take tips.
Call (248) 477-6450.

Methodist church plans \$1.7 million expansion

BY TIM SMITH
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Work is expected to soon begin on a \$1.7 million facility for First United Methodist Church in downtown Farmington.

First on the agenda is the demolition of an unoccupied Thomas Street house owned by the church, which project architect Carl Gaiser of Farmington said could take place within the next week-to-10 days.

Soon after that, workers from Brighton-based Rekon Construction will bring in their equipment and get the multi-faceted project under way.

"I just met with the city and contractor and they're all set to release the permit to tear it down," said Gaiser, whose firm is located at 33018 Grand River, just a few addresses east of the church.

The project will "enlarge, renovate and modernize our church buildings so that we can maintain and expand our ministry and services to our congregation and community," noted the project's mission statement/site plan, which was approved in spring 2000 by the Farmington

Planning Commission. "Everybody is all for it," said Dick Carvell, a member of the church and its building steering committee.

First United will remain open as much as possible during the eight-to-12 month span of the project, of which about \$1 million was raised by church members during a three-year period, Carvell said. The remaining money is being borrowed, he added.

Gaiser said a new wing for administrative offices will be constructed on the north side

(facing Thomas), where the to-be-demolished house currently is located. That side of the church will also feature a main entrance, with elevator access to all three floors.

A makeover also beckons for the Grand River side. There will be the addition of a courtyard and new entrance to the educational wing as well as a new facade and roof.

Inside the church, which Carvell said dates back to 1921, improvements are in store by way of central air conditioning, barrier-free bathrooms on each

level, updated electrical services and a floor plan "where all the spaces work and flow together," continued the project's plan.

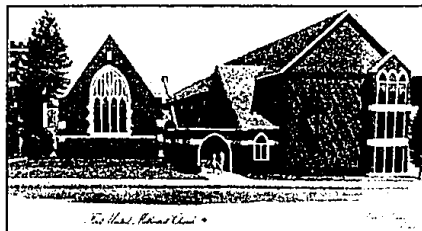
"We're making it all look as if it were built at one particular time," Gaiser said.

One drawback of the project is that First United will not be able to host crafters and vendors during this year's Farmington Founders Festival. But Carvell said the popular ice cream social traditionally hosted during the

fest will again take place this summer as always, in Wesley Hall.

Despite the length of the project, Carvell emphasized that every effort will be made for the church to stay open as usual. "It will remain open and we'll try to maintain everything we have."

Carvell said one of the positives of the project is that, by church offices being relocated to the addition, it will open up additional classroom space.



Volunteer from page A1

line - 248-428-4466 - fields complaints about everything from contracted services to utilities providers. Vandenberg said Ameritech issues have been prevalent.

The most recent case involved a landscaping service that didn't live up to the terms of a private contract for snow removal.

"We were able to locate the owner and encourage the owner to make good on the contract," Vandenberg said. "The resident did receive a refund in full."

Not every case is so easily resolved, but that doesn't stop committee members from trying,

he added. The all-volunteer group has no legal authority and their time is limited, particularly with three vacant seats.

Group membership represents a variety of interests, including the business and legal community, corporations and seniors. The police department is also on board, Vandenberg said.

"Occasionally, some of the calls can border on potential criminal liability," he explained.

Complaints fill out a form with complete information about the dispute, then committee members do their best to work with both sides toward a resolu-

tion. In some cases, people are referred to the attorney general's office or other consumer resource groups.

"We do our very best," Vandenberg said. "We don't necessarily resolve everything. We're limited in our resources and our time."

Anyone interested in joining the Consumer Protection Committee should send a letter indicating their interest and background to Mayor Nancy Bates, Farmington Hills City Hall, 31555 11 Mile Road, Farmington Hills, MI 48336.

Mentors from page A1

rate. If they agree, the parents are notified and must also sign off on the program.

Mentors are volunteer professionals who try to show the kids something about their careers. SiKora finds out what the students' interests are and matches each of them with an appropriate mentor.

Mentors spend about two hours a month with their charges and are permitted to check on their grades in school and sit in on their classes.

"Contact with an adult outside of parents or teachers really makes a difference in their success," SiKora said.

Lately the mentored students have become mentors of a sort themselves as they've begun matching with equal number of elementary students at Horace Mann Elementary School in Detroit. "It was such an exciting event to see when we brought the students to Horace Mann," SiKora said.

On Wednesday, March 7, the

Horace Mann students returned the favor, spending the day at East Middle School with their mentors and their mentors' mentors. "There was so much excitement you could hardly contain the kids," SiKora said. "The other middle schools are 'anxiously awaiting' the extension of the program to their buildings, SiKora said, but it probably won't be expanded until the 2002-03 school year.

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