



**Driven to it:** Wayne State University student Matt Compton of Canton backs out of the driveway, on one of his regular trips to college or work. Take a look at the commuter college lifestyle with the Observer's special back to college package on Page A6.

## Relatives defend accused couple



**Relatives brought in from Cameroon testified in Circuit Court this week they saw no signs that a teen-age girl in the custody of Evelyn and Joseph Djoumessi suffered any kind of abuse while the girl lived in their Hills home.**

BY KEVIN BROWN  
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Relatives of a Farmington Hills couple accused of kidnapping and abusing a teenage girl from Cameroon said the girl did not appear mistreated at their home.

"If I would have saw anything, I would have taken (the girl) with me,"

said "Mama" Katherine Ambe, a first cousin of Evelyn Djoumessi.

Evelyn and Joseph Djoumessi are being tried on charges of conspiring to kidnap, kidnapping and child abuse. Joseph Djoumessi also faces two counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct and third-degree criminal sexual conduct.

Ambe described herself as a blood relative of the girl, who was brought to

the U.S. from Cameroon at age 14. Ambe testified on Thursday that she stayed at the Djoumessi home for two months, beginning in April 1998.

She also addressed the teen's allegation that Joseph Djoumessi raped her in the home.

"Do you recall hearing any noises at night that would suggest Mr. Djoumessi was assaulting (name withheld)?" asked defense attorney Ann Parker.

"I did not hear anything," Ambe said, adding her guest bedroom door was always open because it was hot. Under further testimony, she said Joseph Djoumessi's door was often closed. Earlier testimony established that Evelyn

Djoumessi often worked nights.

The girl, now 18, alleges Joseph Djoumessi raped her five times, that both he and his wife struck her, and that she wasn't allowed to go to school after arriving at their home because she had to take care of the Djoumessis' three children.

### Defense

As defense attorney Parker questioned witnesses from Cameroon, the Djoumessis looked on from a table to the left of Judge Ailte Gilbert. Co-defense attorney Cornelius Pitts studied the proceedings sitting between the

Please see TRIAL, A2

## THE WEEK AHEAD

**Congressional visits:** 11th District Congressman Joe Knollenberg (R-Bloomfield) will be the keynote speaker at the Exchange Club meeting, held Wednesday. Knollenberg will also address the Farmington / Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce at Farmington City Hall on Thursday morning at 8 a.m.

## TUESDAY

**Filing deadline:** Candidates for mayor or one of three city council seats open in Farmington Hills must have their petitions turned in to the City Clerk's office today.

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## Bombs away



**S'more?: Kids** scrambled for marshmallows while others looked up to see if more are on their way down from a Hills Fire Dept. ladder truck at Thursday night's Marshmallow Drop, held at Heritage Park. Above, Sara Stater gathered a handful of marshmallows, which kids exchanged for bags of candy. Right, Nicholas DeRoek enjoys his toasted marshmallows.

STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRZKLER



## Jaycees celebrate 55th year with 'Golden' gala

BY SUE BUCK  
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Though the Jaycees started out as an all male group in 1920, today women members outnumber men in the Farmington Area Jaycees by a 60-40 margin.

Shelly Maxwell is the group's current president. "It was basically formed so young people could get experience in leadership," Maxwell said. "It did not become co-ed until 1984."

The Jaycees, originally called the "Junior Chamber of Commerce," is a leadership training organization for people ages 21-39 who are looking to serve the community, develop their leadership skills and socially network.

"Meaning make friends and make contacts," Maxwell

said.

As of the end of July, the group had 90 members. New members are recruited through existing members, group projects and a Web site.

"We utilize a voter's registration list to send out prospect postcards," Maxwell said. "We send them out to people and follow them up with a phone call."

Projects the public will recognize are the annual Spring Egg Hunt held at Heritage Park, holiday tree-lighting at the Gov. Warner Mansion on Grand River, a children's shopping spree with K Mart on Orchard Lake Road between 13 and 14 Mile roads and the Farmington Neighborhood House.

"Kmart is really helpful," Maxwell said.

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STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRZKLER

## It's that time of year



**Welcome back!** Farmington Schools' 5th annual Back to School picnic, held Thursday, featured entertainment by the Farmington High Falcon Marching Band and Col-orguard. More back to school news, A3.

STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRZKLER

## Safety first when riding the bus

BY SUE BUCK  
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When it comes to riding school buses, the bus driver is in charge.

Bill Tousley, transportation director for the Farmington Public School District, offers this advice and other traveling tips for those riding in and driving around those large, yellow vehicles.

"We're putting together a new handbook," Tousley said Thursday.

Bus rules are simple. The following advi-

Please see BUS SAFETY, A3