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Police probe student's classroom death

By RON GARBINSKI
and STEVE BARNABY

Robert Kourtjian, a 13-year-old East Junior High School student, died Friday afternoon of a suspected electrocution while working at a grinding machine in a shop class, say police officials.

The eighth grade youth, son of Mr. and Mrs. Wallace Kourtjian of 3009 Fiddlers Green in Farmington, was working with the heavy duty shop machine when fellow students heard him moan and then collapse on the floor, said Farmington Hills Director of Public Safety Ronald Holko.

The shop teacher and classmates immediately raced over to Kourtjian and pulled the machine's plug from the wall socket. The shop instructor then began to give the boy artificial mouth-to-mouth artificial resuscitation.

Within minutes, the Farmington Hills police, fire and rescue squads responded to the emergency call and hurried Kourtjian to Botsford General Hospital, where a team of specialists was waiting for the ambulance.

"At 11:15 Friday morning, our station received a call from the school saying that a student might possibly

have been electrocuted. Within minutes, at 11:19 to be exact, the boy was at Botsford Hospital receiving treatment. Before officers arrived on the scene, the shop teacher and assistant principal at the school were applying resuscitation and heart massage to the boy," Holko continued.

"But at 12:40 in the afternoon, we received word from the hospital that effort to save him failed and that he had died."

"Apparently, Kourtjian was working with the grinding machine when he received a shock and collapsed," Holko said. "We are not sure whether it definitely was an electrocution or

whether something else caused him to collapse. But right now (Friday night) it apparently looks like that is the cause."

According to East Principal Gilbert Henderson, the accident happened sometime after 11 a.m. Friday. The school immediately called the Farmington Hills police and faculty members tried to save the youth by using mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and heart massage.

Police quickly sealed off the school's shop area and confiscated anything that could serve as a possible clue why Kourtjian might have collapsed while working in the shop.

"We have completely closed off the shop area and are investigating everything inside the room to see what might have caused the boy to collapse," Holko continued. "We are checking the grinding machine, the electrical wiring around the shop area and anything else that might give us a lead."

As of Friday night, Hills police were still investigating the room and questioning witnesses who were in the room when Kourtjian collapsed.

Farmington School District Superintendent Marjorie Van Aneyde refused to speculate on the cause of the

youth's death, saying that the situation was being investigated by the school district and police.

"When we have an accident such as this we lock up the room until it can be examined. It will stay locked up until the investigation is completed," he said.

According to Van Aneyde, Kourtjian's death was the first of its kind in the school district. Other students have died, but never in a classroom situation.

"I'm a relatively prudent person and I want to make sure all the reports are reviewed first," he said.

For elementary students

Science takes on new approach

Elementary students in the Farmington School District are enthusiastic about a new approach to learning science.

Instead of the textbook method of learning, students are conducting experiments on their own and drawing conclusions from their observations. They are watching ecological systems grow and witnessing life cycles.

"Everyone is really excited about this program. The district started it in the fall, and so far it has been quite successful. After conducting four two-year pilot programs, we finally decided on the one we are using now," said Frank Delewsky, principal at Woodside Elementary School and director of the science program at the elementary level.

The science program is taught in all 17 elementary schools at every grade level. It is divided into two parts. Dur-

ing the first semester, students work in the physical-science areas. The second semester is devoted to a study of life sciences and how they work. It includes an examination of how man fits into this scientific structure.

"Students are learning firsthand from lab experiments and are now taking an active part in discovering what science is all about," Delewsky continued. "Instead of asking questions, they are finding out for themselves. Instead of just reading textbooks, they are actively investigating."

AT EACH GRADE level, students learn about a different phase of science. In the life-science program, students in the first grade start with organisms, and, through the sixth grade, they learn about life cycles, populations, environments, communities and ecosystems.

"This is only the first year of the

program, but conceivably, as we progress, students will go through this whole system of learning. When they leave the elementary level, they will be better ecologically and scientifically educated."

The program attempts to widen their scope of scientific knowledge at an early age. And that's really needed, especially in this day of technological advancement," Delewsky said.

The most important factor in the life-science program is actual student observation of live animals—frogs, insects, chameleons and fish—going through complete life cycles. They witness the various stages of a tadpole, see fish grow, and handle chameleons. They see how wheat grows, how crickets feed on wheat and then how chameleons eat crickets to survive.

"Students are able to watch frogs and chameleons eat, fish grow and

multiply, or see a mealworm go through its various growth stages. Students see how life-sustaining and growing cycles work. They see how chameleons live and begin to understand the relationship between the different environments," said Delewsky.

"I think it is really great for these kids to see the complete cycles and how one creature preys on the other in order to survive. Some are witnessing these things for the first time and are really excited about what they see."

"What better way is there to teach science than when the kids are excited about what they are learning?"

To provide live specimens for each class in the 17 schools, the district maintains a life-science culturing center at Larkshire Elementary School. Gordon Johnson, a fourth-grade teacher at Larkshire, takes care of the center and makes sure that every teacher in the district has the proper specimen for each phase of the program.

At the center are several aquariums full of guppies, snails and plants, frogs and tadpoles in various life stages, tanks of chameleons, and mealworm breeding containers.

"Whenever a teacher in the district needs something for the next project, they just call me and I have everything ready for them to pick up after school," said Johnson. "If they need more guppies or frogs, I put them in more guppies or frogs. I put them in

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Fourth grader Sheri Milligen and her homeroom teacher Gordon Johnson make sure that "Flowerblossom," a 12-foot, 40-pound boa constrictor, remains safely within her glass home. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)



Frank Delewsky (left) and Gordon Johnson check over the master life sciences culturing center at Larkshire Elementary School. At this center the district maintains live animal specimens used in all elementary science classes. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

Twins win contest

When they come home from Providence Hospital in about two weeks, the newborn twin daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Peans of Farmington Hills will ride in style.

The girls, Angela Marie and Rebecca Ann, won the Farmington Area Jaycettes gift of the loan of an Infant Love Seat for as long as needed. In the case of the twins, the group came through with two seats for the family to use.

It's part of the Buckle Up Babies (BUBS) project which the Jaycettes launched late last month.

The couple were delighted with their gifts which came when the twins were the first babies born during BUBS week, Jan. 5-11.

Mrs. Peans said, "We had read about the offer in the paper and

planned to rent them. The babies are fine, just fine and will be home in about two weeks, as soon as they weigh five pounds."

The twins are the first children for the Lark couple who were happy to accept the gift-loan.

In the meantime, the Jaycettes have been busy promoting both the seat rental and vehicle safety in general. After an appearance on a local TV station, which was seen by a GM executive, they were invited to be a part of the GM display at the auto show.

Publicity chairman for the BUBS campaign Mary Ann Brady said,

"Harriet Reed, Sue Zarella and I, as well as many from the general membership, will be down at the auto show both weekends.

"We won't be selling the infant seats as much as talking about automotive safety. One GM executive told me that of all the Jaycette Chapters, ours has done best with publicity and public interest."

The idea behind the safety campaign was to make the car seats available to parents of infants at a rate that was just too inexpensive to pass up.

The seats are designed for babies from birth to 30 pounds. They are constructed of two polypropylene shells. The outer shell conforms to the auto seat and the inner one is contoured for the child's comfort and support.

Those interested in renting one should contact Harriet (Mrs. William A.) Reed, 22719 Brookdale, Farmington.

Board members debate millage election date

By RON GARBINSKI

The Farmington School District faces a possible special millage election sometime in the next few months to determine the financial future of area schools, say school administrators.

With state aid for Farmington schools being reduced by \$346,000 and four mills of extra voted millage for operation expiring with this year's tax levy, something must be done to supplement the lost funds.

THE DISTRICT'S PRESENT millage is 34.213 mills. Of this amount, 36 mills are provided by the district and 8.13 mills are earmarked for Farmington by the county. With the expiration of the four mills approved by voters in 1965 for a 10-year period, the district's extra voted millage will be reduced to only 22 mills.

According to William Prisk, district business manager, the district does not expect to receive "no less" as allocation from the county next year than it has received for the past several years. Without a renewal or addition to the present millage, the operating millage for the 1976-77 school year will be reduced to 30.13 mills.

"It will be impossible to carry out the district's current educational programs and operations with less millage next year than this in effect this current year, and almost positively more millage will be needed for next year than has been available for the last year," Prisk told the Farmington School Board.

Prisk said that in the past the millage question has been handled best by special elections. He recommended that the board approve a special millage election for Tuesday, April 6. But the board failed to agree on the

date and postponed the issue until its next regular meeting on Jan. 23 at Duncraft Junior High School.

Even though the majority of school board members said they believe a millage increase or renewal is necessary, there was much debate concerning the date of any millage election.

"There is no doubt about it, we need the funds. In a community where we care about our kids, we have to get the point across to everyone," said Trustee Gary Lichtman. "But I feel we should not have a special election. Rather than take funds away from the students and services in conducting a special election, I feel we should save the funds and tie the election into the regular June election we are required by law to conduct," he continued.

"I will not support that April date and feel we should not support both elections and waste money we could use elsewhere."

Trustee Ann Struble, Dr. Mervyn Ross and Emma Makinen supported

the April date and said that the sooner the district acts on the millage question, the sooner it will be able to plan for next school year.

"If nobody in the legislature knows where they are going in regards to further state school aid cuts, then we must be prepared to do something," said Trustee Makinen.

"We cannot afford to wait like we did several years ago when we went into the summer before deciding on the millage question. We cannot wait that long because of our responsibility to teachers and everyone else. We can't leave them hanging like that not knowing whether they will be pink slipped or what," she said.

ANOTHER FACTOR complicating the millage question is the uncertainty in the state aid payment schedules.

Prisk said he has estimated revenues and expenses for 1976-77 at this year's "budgeted levels."

If current programs and services

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AFTER SCHOOL CLASSES

The Farmington Area Recreation Commission is offering a variety of programs for young and old alike. To see where you fit in turn to page 7A.